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How to Get on  
The Stage  
and  
How to Succeed there

Leopold Wagner



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## How to Get on the Stage



# How to Get on the Stage

And How to Succeed There

By

Leopold Wagner

Author of

'Roughing-it on the Stage,' 'The Stage with the Curtain Raised,'

'Pantomimes and All About Them,' etc.



London

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1899

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## Preface

YEARS have sped along since 'The Stage with the Curtain Raised' was first issued to the public. That little book was received with the utmost favour by the press and the leading lights of the theatrical profession; it has now for some time been out of print. In the present work the same subject is treated much more exhaustively, and, it is hoped, to much better purpose. Dramatic aspirants and talented amateurs desirous of becoming real actors and actresses are daily on the increase, but for lack of a 'guide, philosopher, and friend,' they readily fall a prey to the professional schemer. Studied in conjunction with the companion volume, 'Roughing-It on the Stage,' which is a faithful record of actual experiences, 'How to Get on the Stage' should supply a distinct want. Nothing further need be said.

L. W.



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# How to Get on the Stage

## ‘The Play’s the Thing !’

THE actor’s profession has always cast its magic spell over the dwellers in cities and towns. Even in remote country places the chance visit of a wandering theatrical company turns the head of many a native, and often succeeds in seducing him from the prosaic walk of his daily life, ‘to strut and fret his hour upon the stage,’ disport himself in gay apparel, declaim heroic speeches, and merit the applause of the groundlings. There can be few mortals that have not at some period of their lives been stage-struck. It is not only the youth entranced by his first visit to the play who cherishes the conviction that he is a born actor. We once made the acquaintance of a middle-aged newsagent who bitterly bewailed his lack of opportunities to gratify his ambition by going on the stage. As we strolled homewards together at dead of night, he improved the occasion by loudly reciting the Closet Scene

from *Hamlet* under a street lamp, until his performance was rudely interrupted by an irate householder pouring the contents of the water-jug on his offending head. Whether that disappointed newsagent would have made his mark as an actor we will not attempt to say.

That so many persons drift into commonplace occupations, and eventually turn puritanical in their views of the stage, or, if they do not go to this extreme, allow the cares of life to wean them from the attractions of the playhouse, is no evidence that a fair vision of theatrical fame was never unfolded to their minds. Others become ardent playgoers to the end of their days, forgetting at last that the real secret of their interest in the drama must be sought in joyous hours devoted to the mimetic art when life was young. The juvenile recitation, the dramatic duologue, and the school play are things which lie at the root of aspirations that in after-years give so many recruits to the theatrical ranks. Dramatists and dramatic critics have in almost all cases owed their future literary pursuits to a youthful fondness for the play. The recreative direction of a toy theatre, too, has produced some of our most successful stage-managers.

Not a few of the most admired actresses of our time developed their early taste for the drama amid influences very far removed from the theatre, namely, at the convents where they received their education. The periodical dramatic entertainments superintended by the gentle Sisterhood within convent walls are in

all respects excellent. Mrs. Beerbohm Tree took part in a Greek play before Mr. Gladstone during her Queen’s College days, while to Mr. F. R. Benson was assigned the organization of the Greek plays produced at Oxford University in his time.

On the other hand, there are those who, like Miss St. Cyr and the late George Barrett, never witnessed a dramatic representation until they entered the theatre professionally, and had perforce to nurse their ambition by stealth. In their case, as in that of many others, the dramatic instinct was assuredly inborn; despite every obstacle, they ultimately won their way to success on the boards. Supporters of the Church and Stage Guild would probably be astonished were an enumeration made of modern actors and actresses who are the offspring of clergymen, some of them not at all kindly disposed towards the stage.

Mr. Kyrle Bellew, a son of the Rev. J. C. M. Bellew, the eminent public reader, deferred his long-disputed desire to enter the dramatic profession until his father had shuffled off this mortal coil. Mr. George Alexander relates that his mother had never seen the inside of a theatre, while his father was an intense hater of plays and players. Mr. Wilson Barrett was never allowed to see a play, but one night he fought his way into the gallery of the old Princess’s Theatre, and then and there vowed he would become an actor. Mr. Henry Howe excited the wrath of his parents by his dramatic predilections, yet he did not hesitate to forsake



the ancestral mansion in order to follow his bent. Mr. Henry Neville declined a commission in the army as an alternative to the stage, a determination which entirely alienated him from his father's sympathies and oft-needed assistance. The same alternative was offered the late Arthur Cecil, whose passion for amateur theatricals, and a wholesale distaste for his father's profession of the law, prompted him to break away from parental restraint as the only means of becoming an actor in real earnest. As well might we expect the incoming tide to recede at the word of command as strive to interdict the stage to those who are naturally fitted for it.

### The Stage-struck Hero.

The born actor, however, belongs to a totally different *genus* to the average stage-struck hero. It is unquestionably in the theatre that the latter first becomes infected with the stage-fever. 'The gaudy attire of the players,' writes the author of 'The Confessions of a Strolling Player,' an amusing little work published in 1858, 'the beautiful scenery, the brilliant light from a thousand lamps, the fitful pleasure of the moment, and the admiring audience in their gay dresses, like peacocks in the sun, no doubt lay siege to the senses of youthful beholders, and tempt them to entertain notions of leaping into that mysterious region from which they are only separated by the green baize.'

Since then many things have happened in the theatrical world, and the green baize has almost disappeared; still, the stage-fever is as rampant as ever. In these days particularly, when theatrical *mise en scène* has attained a degree of perfection never dreamt of in the palmy days of the drama, when acting has become fashionable, and 'Green-Room Gossip' forms a regular newspaper feature, stage-struck heroes are legion. Unfortunately, it is only the picturesque aspect of the actor's profession that comes into the purview of the masses; the seamy side is studiously withheld. The record of long and patient struggles with adversity is never committed to the notebook of the ubiquitous 'interviewer.' Only now and again, at a festive banquet, when tongues are loosened by a pervading feeling of good-fellowship, do such hard facts reach the public ear, and then they are set forth in that highly romantic fashion which invests them with an added glory. Of the uphill fight of our newest actors—those who have but lately won their way to the goal—we hear little or nothing; it would seem as if they wish it to be inferred that by a sudden stroke of genius they stepped at once into popularity. That such is not the case can be attested by those who move much among actors and possess their confidence. Generally speaking, if they cannot lay claim to a strolling experience in the past, they have been before the public for years in very subordinate positions ere the opportunity presented itself of making a palpable hit.



### ‘Poor Players.’

Go where one will, in town or country, the ‘poor player’ of tradition is always in evidence. Actors of high and low degree perambulate the Strand daily, because they are ‘resting,’ which means that they are working very hard to procure an engagement; while on many a suburban waste the portable booth or modern Richardson’s show, yeapt a ‘penny gaff,’ thrusts itself upon the view. Those who have climbed the ladder of Fame—those, too, who ceaselessly fight for a place at its foot, never maintaining a foothold on the bottom rungs—could a tale unfold that would quench any ordinary enthusiasm on the part of the aspirant for theatrical renown. Nor is the race of the ‘strollers’ by any means extinct. We are so accustomed to persuade ourselves that the improved condition of the stage has changed the actor’s lot for the better, that an occasional news-item like the following takes us by surprise:

A THEATRICAL COMPANY’S EXPERIENCES.—At a meeting of the Salford Board of Guardians on Friday, it was reported that among the occupants of the tramp ward the previous evening were seven members of a theatrical company who, it is alleged, had been left destitute by a ‘bogus’ manager. They were respectably dressed, but only a penny was found among the seven.\*

If we substitute the modern ‘fit-up tour’ for the ‘barnstorming’ of old, it will be found on inquiry

\* *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, December 1, 1895

that all the traditional vicissitudes incident to a roving profession are yet to be experienced in out-of-the-way places. Commenting on ‘The Difficulties of Beginners,’ the *Era*, in a leading article on March 21, 1896, said :

‘The surface of affairs theatrical in London is so smooth that we are apt to imagine that there are no such persons as the strolling players of the past. But perusal of the two most truthful tales which have been published about the stage of late—Mr. J. K. Jerome’s “On the Stage and Off,” and Mr. Leopold Wagner’s “Roughing-it on the Stage” —is calculated to destroy that illusion. They depict a life of shifts and struggles, of distresses and disappointments. It is not too much, indeed, to say that if the aspirant to the stage could see spread before him a map of all that he would have to go through and put up with before he became worth even £3 a week, he would, like Shakespeare’s lad, fold up the map, and sit him down and die. Mr. Jerome represented a state of affairs in which every shilling of weekly salary—and there were not many shillings—had to be extracted from the obdurate managers by violent threats and remonstrances. Mr. Wagner had £50 to fall back upon, and his chief annoyances and anxieties arose from the delay in forwarding remittances, which was caused by the dilatoriness of the friend in whose hands he had placed the sum. But in both these books the twin spirits, Bogus and Bohemianism, are ever present. And the Bohemianism is not the delicate fancy-work of

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St. John's Wood or South Kensington, but the genuine article, with its meagre dinners, dubious beds, and importunate landladies.'

### The Romance of Failure.

Yet it cannot be denied that, in spite of all hardships, there is something akin to a mesmeric attraction in the vagabondism of the strolling player. Many youths run away from home to go to sea; others seek 'the bubble reputation in the cannon's mouth'; still more, perhaps, attach themselves to the first ramshackle Temple of Thespis that offers them scope for imagined glory. A settled state in a first-class engagement is as devoid of incident as is the daily round of a City Alderman or the average London clerk. No kind of reading is so dull as the barren record of performances, albeit that fact is generally overlooked by the chronicler of things theatrical. Actors' lives are interesting only in proportion as they have roughed-it in their early days. The adage that 'Poverty makes a man acquainted with strange bedfellows,' is abundantly exemplified in the lower ranks of the dramatic profession; 'moving accidents by flood and field,' and adventures grave and gay, that alternately thrill and set the table on a roar, are the monopoly of the whilom unfortunate. The sweets of prosperity are appreciated by none so much as by those who have tasted the bitterness of discouragement and failure. It is not given to every gifted histrion to enjoy what



is called a 'comfortable' engagement during the years of his probation. The large majority, of varying degrees of ability, are fated to toil along the rough road on which so many pilgrims have stumbled and fallen. The stage is at once the best and the worst paid profession that can be embraced by man or woman, according to the talents and the *opportunities* of the devotee. Success on the stage is not to be commanded without the possession of extraordinary ability; those whose talents are mediocre are quickly undeceived. And when we speak of success, we of course refer to positions worth having. It is quite possible to obtain a subordinate position on the boards after years of study and hard work, to say nothing of actual bodily suffering; but when all this is taken into account, the emoluments to be derived scarcely bear comparison with the possibilities of social advancement in other spheres of human endeavour. The most gifted actors have generally to pass through a long apprenticeship, and many trials and privations, ere the salaries they command can be regarded as a compensating set-off against the sacrifices perforce to be made. Theatrical success is for the most part built up on a foundation of repeated failures. The exceptional instances of actors and actresses leaping into popularity at once only prove the rule.

## Roughing-it on the Stage.

Let us cull from the known lives of actors whose names are 'familiar in men's mouths as household words' a few of their dearly-bought experiences. Those of the past need scarcely detain us, since all are aware that their path to eminence was far from a rosy one.

Edmund Kean tramped about the country for years, his sword, on which was slung the bundle that contained his scanty wardrobe, over his shoulder, acting in barns, reciting in public-houses, teaching fencing and dancing—once even engaging in a bout with a noted pugilist—resorting to all manner of shifts for his daily bread. On one occasion he set out with his wife to walk from Birmingham to Swansea, furnished with but a few shillings to help him on the journey; while, worse than all, his devoted companion was in no fit state of health to endure the fatigue. 'At York,' says Barton Baker in 'Our Old Actors,' alluding to another ill-starred engagement, 'he arrived utterly destitute. So extreme was his need that he presented himself for enlistment as a common soldier, but the officer attached to the regiment good-naturedly dissuaded him from the project. More than once his wife had knelt down by the bedside of her half-famished children, and prayed that they and herself might be at once released from their sufferings by death.'

In like desperation Munden, in his starving days, once implored a militiaman whom he met on the

highroad to take him to the inn where he was billeted, and give him some supper and a bed, promising to enrol himself as a comrade in the morning. By that time, however, the artful comedian had vanished. The elder Mathews, when he first went on the stage, often knew what it was to fast for twenty-four hours at a stretch, yet, as Baker informs us, he was 'all the while studying with undiminished enthusiasm parts which he might never be called upon to play.'

When Edwin Forrest, the American tragedian, was at the ebb of his fortunes, he found himself benighted in the vicinity of a little roadside inn. With just sufficient money to pay for the accommodation, he gladly took a bed there. Waking up in broad daylight, he was surprised to discover another wayfarer surveying him from the opposite bed. The two men glared at each other for a few minutes, then quietly composed themselves for another nap. After a considerable lapse of time, Forrest ventured to observe, 'Time to get up, stranger!' 'Guess it is,' was the curt rejoinder. Still, neither of them made the least attempt to rise. 'I guess you intend to make tracks some time to-day?' said Forrest, after another long interval. 'Can't say I'm in a cast-iron hurry; guess you might set me the example,' was the reply. At length Forrest, anxious to resume his journey, sat up boldly, and, tucking the counterpane under his chin, exclaimed, 'Tell you what it is, stranger: I've been waiting for you to get up first, because I didn't



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want you to see I haven't got a shirt to my back !' 'Then why the tarnation couldn't you say so before ?' thundered the other. 'That's just my case ; let's turn out now !' Years later these two travellers met again under very different circumstances : Forrest was at the zenith of his popularity ; the other had become a famous judge.

Even the great John Kemble suffered all the concomitant miseries of a chronic poverty while travelling the rough road which finally led him to Drury Lane. 'Come with me,' he said one day to a brother actor who complained that he had not enjoyed a dinner for weeks ; 'I know a place where you can eat as much as you like, and have nothing to pay.' The hungry actor was only too delighted at the prospect. Presently his guide drew up at the entrance to a turnip-field. 'There !' he exclaimed. 'Make haste to begin ; I have dined here myself many a time !'

### Modern Actors who have Roughed-it.

But to descend at once to our own day. Sir Henry Irving's initial engagement on the boards represented the not very satisfactory honorarium of ten shillings a week. Most playgoers are aware that he had a hard tussle with fortune during the long period of fifteen years ere he captured the public with his marvellous impersonation of Matthias in *The Bells*. So poor was he that he frequently found himself unable to meet his landlady's demands for

## Modern Actors who have Roughed-it 13

board and lodging. It is an open secret that Sir Henry has a private list of humble pensioners who regularly receive a substantial cheque in recognition of kindnesses meted out to him in his struggling days. Pleasant also it is to reflect that he allowed Leopold Lewis, the adapter of the play in which he first made his mark, a life-long pension such as puts our country's treatment of martial heroes to shame.

Another eminent actor, of the romantic school, after playing a round of leading parts without receiving his dues at the week's end, persuaded his manager to allow him to take a benefit. For this important event he enlisted the services of the resident scenic artist to touch up some old scenery. The benefit took place, but it did not put much money into the pockets of the *beneficiaire*. A day or two later the artist in distemper ventured to present his little bill at the unfashionable hour of breakfast-time. He found the actor and another poor player on the point of sitting down to the repast. Mr. Blank thus addressed his visitor: 'You see before you a couple of able-bodied men about to breakfast frugally on *one* herring. It is very certain we shall not have any dinner, and I doubt very much whether we shall get any tea; so it must be very plain to you that I am not in a position at present to pay you for the work you have done for me.' The artist gracefully retired.\*

\* Our authority for the citation of this anecdote is the scenic artist himself. The actor has probably forgotten the incident. In his absence from England we do not feel warranted in mentioning his name.



Mr. Edward Terry's early experiences in the profession were immeasurably dismal. Time after time the manager decamped with the week's receipts, leaving his unfortunate company to get out of the town as best they could. If there is one actor who could wax eloquent on the wiles of the bogus manager, it is the comedian who now rejoices in a handsome little theatre of his own. Mr. Arthur Williams has had thirty years' experience of the stage, during nearly two-thirds of which he passed through all the vicissitudes common to the strolling actor. Once, after being burnt out of a promising engagement, he fell in with a manager at Dover, who very soon declared himself unable to pay salaries, whereupon the player of many parts was put to the expedient of walking back to London with just twopence in his pocket. The late George Barrett knocked about the country for years, taking what engagements he could, but rarely receiving the full amount of salary he bargained for. It was not always as an actor that he found employment; often he contented himself with comic singing to earn a crust. Mr. Mark Kinghorne was so disgusted with repeated experiences of a depleted treasury that he forsook the drama to take up the rough-and-tumble business of clown in a travelling circus, and afterwards joined a ghost show. That, of course, was years ago. A well-known actor who has latterly met with considerable success on the operatic stage was at one time threatened with actual starvation, having passed three whole days without food. In

this extremity he called upon Mr. George Grossmith, who gave him a few serviceable introductions and the use of some of his songs, thus helping him to a start as a drawing-room entertainer.

### The Mistakes of Aspirants.

Nothing would be easier than to run through the entire gamut of the dramatic profession for illustrations, but enough has been said to point a moral for the benefit of the merely stage-struck. With these facts before him, the would-be actor, however talented he may be, will do well to reflect seriously upon the probable issue of his endeavours to enter the theatrical ranks—a step not to be lightly taken. The conviction of being a born actor is not in itself sufficient to warrant his embarkation on a sea of troubles. To that conviction must be added qualities rarely taken into account by the aspirant. As Mr. James Welch observed in a recent address to the Playgoers' Club: 'So many points are to be considered by those who wish to go on the stage. Am I fitted mentally and bodily? Have I got the spirit and the heart to bear up under countless heart-breaking disappointments? Have I got sufficient will force or that wholesome determined obstinacy which is even better than will in the face of obstacles? And, above all, the art must be taken up honestly and seriously.' In short, there must be a genuine enthusiasm. Without it no one ever yet succeeded in any artistic pursuit. It is this enthusiasm which

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enables him to fight the good fight valorously under all circumstances, and makes him content with humble beginnings. Those who are smitten with the stage-fever alone invariably covet leading parts from the first.

And here, before proceeding further, let us observe that the motives which actuate the would-be actor are not always the most laudable. Too often a dissatisfaction with the humdrum monotony of his daily avocation, the glory of seeing his name confront him on the hoardings and in the newspapers, together with a pleasing idea that a three hours' nightly traffic of the stage constitutes the sum total of an actor's work, are the real incentives. Little does such a one know that that which is seemingly 'play' to the 'kind friends in front' is nothing short of hard labour, coupled with vanity and vexation of spirit, behind the footlights. The disenchantment of the stage soon comes home to those who have for a brief term found employment behind the scenes.

An ex-dresser at one of the London theatres thus sums up her impressions of Stageland: 'I never could see the delight of looking beautiful for an hour or two every night, perspiring if you are a man, envied and hated by your neighbours if you are a woman. I have watched a popular low comedian come off half dead, mopping his forehead; while his wife, engaged in the same piece, looked lovely enough, but stood shivering in the wings.' Then the fatiguing rehearsals in town, the ever-recurring Sunday travel-



ling, packing and unpacking of one's belongings, cheerless lodgings, insanitary dressing-rooms, and other incidentals of the touring system, largely discount the alleged excitement of acting 'at night.'

### How Aspirants are Duped.

Perhaps the most potent factor in the latter-day invasion of the stage by the absolutely unfit is the familiar newspaper advertisement :

DRAMATIC ASPIRANTS required immediately for extended tour. Salaried engagement. Previous experience not necessary.

A moment's thought would surely lead to the conclusion that there is more in this than meets the eye. Without 'previous experience'—there is a smack of tautology in the expression—the search for employment in any walk of life is generally beset with difficulties. How much more futile, then, under the like conditions, must be the endeavour to obtain a 'salaried engagement' on the stage! As scores of giddy youths and maidens could testify, such advertisements are a delusion and a snare. They resolve themselves into so many attempts to extract money from the pockets of the respondents. The advertiser poses as the manager of a company shortly to be set on tour, and his desire is to secure 'people' able and willing to pay him a premium for a first appearance. If they are foolish enough to part with their money, they find, when too late, that the projected tour is

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a myth, and the 'manager' has suddenly changed his address.

Playgoers may recollect the wholesale frauds on dramatic aspirants perpetrated some time ago by a couple of adventurers trading under the name of Terry 'for professional purposes.' In the end they were committed to durance vile, as they richly deserved. In June, 1898, a self-styled 'actor' was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour for similar malpractices. His aider and abettor was a *soi-disant* 'well-known actress,' who lent her name to the fictitious touring company. To quote from the newspaper reports :

Mr. Mathews said the prisoners were charged with having attempted to obtain, and with having obtained, sums of money from the various complainants on the pretence of securing for them lucrative engagements with a theatrical touring company called 'The — Touring Company.' They advertised in a newspaper under the heading 'Amateurs and Novices,' and obtained the money from the prosecutors in the form of deposits as a guarantee of good faith. The company was supposed to start in November, 1897, but it was postponed from time to time. The case for the prosecution was that there was no *bonâ-fide* intention on the part of the accused to fulfil their contracts with the complainants, and they had obtained money from them under fraudulent representations. Prisoner was at one time connected with a theatrical touring company. He and the female prisoner shared the same rooms at Chesterton Road, South Kensington, where they passed as man and wife. A number of witnesses gave evidence as to the circumstances under which they had parted with their money. . . . The jury found both prisoners 'Guilty,' but recommended the woman to mercy. A police-

sergeant informed the court that the male prisoner had been under the notice of the police since 1892. He was known as a 'bogus' manager, and had left a company of eight women 'stranded' at Northampton. He obtained money from the Actors' Benevolent Fund for the purpose of getting his company back, but he was stated to have used it for his own purposes. As to the woman, she belonged to most respectable parents. She was married, but left her husband in 1893. She had inserted advertisements on her own account, but in the main she appeared to have acted under the influence of the male prisoner. The latter was sentenced to twelve months' hard labour. Sentence on the woman was postponed until the next sessions.

Another case of the very same character was reported in the newspapers of September 3, 1898.

In some instances the advertising adventurer, affecting to be honest and straightforward, discusses business with his visitor in these terms: 'If you have never been on the stage, it is very clear you can know nothing about acting; therefore, before you can expect to earn a salary, you must be taught. My fee for coaching you will be £5, cash down. As soon as you are proficient, I'll get you a salaried engagement.' The would-be actor exchanges his £5, or whatever the stated sum may be, for a receipt. He studies a few soliloquies, and flatters himself he is making capital progress, until very soon the tutor informs him that he is woefully disappointed in him; he can make nothing of him. In short, it would be only wasting time to continue. And so the guileless aspirant, finding the law powerless to assist him in the matter of having his money refunded, returns



to his former employment a wiser and a sadder man. It may be that he has come up to London purposely for the tuition. Professional schemers who systematically run a 'Dramatic Academy' or 'College of Elocution' are many, their wives letting the lodgings to country dupes. The pupil is always got rid of on the earliest opportunity, unless, perchance, his friends are confessedly in a position to back up his aspirations with sufficient capital to go into management for the adventurer's sole profit. Should it happen, however, that he is naturally fitted for a theatrical career, his efforts to obtain a legitimate introduction to the boards through the instrumentality of such a 'coach' would be altogether mistaken.

These schemers have not the slightest influence with managers. If they are known in the profession at all, it is scarcely on account of their commercial stability. The utmost they could do to 'bring out' a talented pupil would be to make free with his money for the organization of a bogus tour. It is from occasional opportunities such as these that bogus managers spring into existence. The mere fact of their advertising in a popular newspaper bespeaks their anxiety to trade upon the weakness of humanity, for their victims are mostly drawn from that large class of persons who, without talent, without being even stage-struck, look upon the stage as an easy and pleasant means of earning money, and not unfrequently as the 'open sesame' to that 'free life' which men and women of loose morals associate with the dramatic profession.

## Undesirable Aspirants.

It is unhappily too true that many people take to the stage for ends that are ignoble. They readily spend their all for the gratification of their vicious pleasures by purchasing an introduction to a fifth-rate touring company, where they think they can 'run the racket,' without the least restraint. The command of sufficient means to enable them to go into management on a small scale only accentuates the evil. Of course, there are always certain low-class actors and stage-managers willing to further their designs for their own temporary advantage, and upon their kind the bogus manager thrives considerably. The moneyed partner with a taste for acting or business management in a touring organization is generally a person to be avoided. It is true he serves a useful purpose in helping a struggling author-actor to exploit a new play—a piece of workmanship that has gone the rounds of the regular managers in vain—and as long as salaries are forthcoming, the company engaged do not want for the necessities of life; but he invariably quits the field the moment he discovers that self-respecting actresses are proof against his advances. The influx of so called 'amateurs' of this stamp has done more than aught else to bring the dramatic profession into bad repute. Lovely woman on the stage is not naturally prone to evil courses; she is just what stress of circumstances and the voice of the tempter make her.



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While so many of the smaller fry of managers and actor-managers who take to the road have to rely upon a 'backer' for the success of their enterprise, it is almost impossible to eliminate the unhealthy influences which are ever at work in the profession. The only safeguard lies in the moral strength of the actresses themselves. But to proceed.

How little the popular mind comprehends the mental qualifications that go to fit a man or woman for the stage is amusingly illustrated by the letters occasionally addressed to well-known managers by would-be actors.\* Mr. Beerbohm Tree has made public the following extract from a house-painter's application for an engagement at the Haymarket Theatre: 'I enclose you a newspaper cutting, from which you will see that I have aptitude for the stage.' The enclosure was the report of a police court case containing these words: 'The defendant, who conducted his own case, denied the assault, and defended himself in a highly dramatic manner.' This was, perhaps, little more to the point than the 'respectful inquiry' received by an eminent teacher of singing from a would-be pupil: 'Will you be good enough to let me know how much you charge for "Voice Production"? I have no singing voice, but I would be willing to pay you any reasonable terms if you could produce one for me, because singers earn a good deal more money than I can make in the hairdressing business.'

\* Some delicious missives of this nature will be found in the Bancrofts' Reminiscences, chap. viii.

It cannot be assumed that the artistic aims of those who think of the stage only as a means of bettering themselves are high. The sum of their desires is possibly the stage crowd, the opera chorus, or those who merely 'walk on' in a drawing-room scene; and it is very certain that, supposing them to obtain a footing on the boards, they will never rise to the dignity of speaking parts. To such aspirants these pages are *not* addressed, though, as will presently be shown, the lower ranks of the profession are not altogether to be despised as a means to an end.

Given education, patience, industry, indomitable perseverance, business energy, and genuine enthusiasm, openings can be found on the modern stage for all whose histrionic talents are not simply mediocre. Mediocrity never rises above a certain dead level, where it does not utterly fail as a wage-earner; it is this mediocrity which every year swells the professional ranks more and more, thus making the conditions doubly hard for the really talented. 'I have known the greatest duffers become actors,' is a common saying among players of the old school. They do, very often, by sheer force of study and determination; but they never make their mark, and in the long-run find themselves relegated to back positions, notwithstanding all their experience. How many old actors do we find glad to earn a pittance as supernumeraries, or playing in booths on the commonwealth system! Study and intelligence will do much, but *talent there must be* to lead to

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success. Education and refinement, combined with all those commercial qualities that make for success in any other career, yet without the special gifts that are so essential to an actor, only lead the aspirant astray. Some of the best playwrights and stage-managers spent the greater portion of their lives in fruitlessly trying to win a position as actors, but they there acquired that practical knowledge which afterwards proved of such excellent service in kindred avocations—witness Tom Robertson and Horace Wigan.

### First Steps to the Stage.

How to get on the stage?—that is the question. Sooth to say, a legitimate introduction to the profession is much easier of accomplishment under the present conditions of theatrical affairs than it was in the old stock company days. Then the aspirant had either to tender his services to a manager occupying a temporary pitch on some isolated waste never hallowed by the least theatrical traditions, or else ‘write in’ by wholesale to the presiding geniuses of the regular playhouses in town and country. He might perhaps scrape an acquaintance with local actors domiciled for an entire dramatic season in his native town, and presently be allowed to make himself useful behind the scenes on a benefit night, until in time he came to be entrusted with a few speaking lines. In the main, however, his initial engagement was always very hard to find. Agents



there were, as now, who for a fee placed his name on their books, and after a certain term of disappointment sent him down to a miserable country theatre where no actor was ever known to earn his salt, or, mayhap, to a manager of the bogus type. A good wardrobe was in those days indispensable, not only for the stage, but for the harmless necessary purpose of securing credit from a country station-master when his travelling expenses back to town were not at his command, as also for raising a loan from 'mine uncle.' So with this first experience of impecuniosity he might consider himself a full-fledged actor.

Under the new *régime* a first appearance is not so very difficult to obtain, always provided the aspirant is willing to work up his way from small beginnings. We purpose in this work to point out the manner in which he should proceed, but before doing so would seriously impress upon him the advisability of putting his talents to a practical test. There can be no better way of doing this than by joining an amateur dramatic club. Such training schools for the stage now abound in every country town; in London their number is almost beyond computation. Mr. J. H. Barnes qualified himself for the professional stage by the share he took in the regular performances of his fellow-employés at Whiteley's, Westbourne Grove. Most of the large millinery establishments and Manchester goods warehouses have their own amateur clubs in these days, and very efficient they are.

## ‘Private Theatres.’

The advantages of belonging to an amateur dramatic club need not be emphasized. Where the players are on a friendly footing with their audience, the misery of stage-fright is scarcely experienced, or, at any rate, it is speedily overcome. The ‘private theatres,’ concerning which Charles Dickens wrote an amusing chapter in his ‘Sketches by Boz,’ have entirely died out; there is nowadays no such thing as Dick, Tom, and Harry murdering Shakespeare in a disused workshop or small factory approached by a back-alley, for the delectation of a jeering crowd. All the parts, great and small, were paid for according to a recognised scale; the question of ability to sustain them never entered into the transaction for one moment.

Says the author of ‘Pickwick’: ‘That stupid-looking milksop, with light hair and bow-legs—a kind of man whom you can warrant town-made—is fresh caught; he plays Malcolm to-night just to accustom himself to an audience. He will get on better by degrees; he will play Othello in a month, and in a month more will probably be apprehended on a charge of embezzlement. The black-eyed female with whom he is talking so earnestly is dressed for the Gentlewoman. It is her first appearance, too, in that character. The boy of fourteen, who is having his eyebrows smeared with soap and whiting, is Duncan, King of Scotland; and the two dirty men

with the corked countenances, in very old green tunics and dirty drab boots, are the “Army.”

R. W. Elliston and Charles Mathews could not resist the seductions of the private theatre when they were boys together; they took part in many a performance in Short’s Gardens, Drury Lane. The latter afterwards, as Barton Baker informs us in his interesting book, ‘and a young gentleman named Litchfield, paid fifteen guineas to be allowed to act *Richard the Third* at Richmond, and fought such a tremendous combat, in consequence of Richard, proud of his swordsmanship, declining to be killed, that the house loudly demanded the tyrant’s death.’

Among others who were destined to pass from the rough training of the private theatre to the professional stage were John Liston and Charles Mayne Young. Charles Phelps, who had done some acting in a small way at Devonport, made his first appearance in an important part at a famous private theatre in Rawstorne Street, Clerkenwell, paying five guineas for the privilege of enacting Earl Osmond in *The Castle Spectre*, a play very much in vogue with amateurs of that day.

The late F. B. Chatterton, the well-known manager of Drury Lane Theatre, was in his youth as stage-struck as mortal could be. Making the acquaintance of several amateurs who spent their time and money in Rawstorne Street, at Pym’s private theatre in Gooch Street, Tottenham Court Road, and at the Cabinet Theatre, King’s Cross, it struck him to inquire how the purveyors of the entertain-



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ments at these places came out with a profit. He was soon made wise on the subject. We quote from his own narrative in 'Players and Playwrights I have Known,' by Mr. John Coleman :

'Upon the understanding that I was to induce some stage-struck aspirants, more verdant than ourselves, to pay liberally for the privilege of making fools of themselves, I was allotted the part of young Farningham in the play *The Lords of Ellingham*, and Higgins in the farce of *Boots at the Swan*. On payment (in advance) of the sum of three shillings, I received twelve shillings' worth of tickets, every one of which I sold to my friends ; so that you see I got my parts for nothing, and made nine shillings by the transaction.'

Emboldened by this attempt, young Chatterton determined to go into management on his own account, engaging the Cabinet Theatre, and there putting up *Othello* and *Box and Cox*. He confesses that he made a dreadful hash of the 'dusky Moor,' but he already conceived that management was more in his way than acting. An ironmonger in the Edgware Road paid him thirty shillings for the privilege of playing Iago, the respective exponents of Roderigo, Brabantio, Montano, and Ludovico paid three - and - sixpence each, and a Clearing-house clerk gladly laid down the sum of £2 for the opportunity of appearing as Cassio. The two ladies paid nothing for their parts, and right well they acted them ; the Emilia was a young lady who in after-years supported Mrs. Langtry

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at the Prince of Wales' (then the Prince's) Theatre, under the stage-name of Miss Adelaide Bowring. The parts of Box and Cox represented a payment of three-and-sixpence each.

### Amateur Clubs and Private Theatricals.

We thus see that talented actors have not disdained to accustom themselves to the footlights in very poor company, but matters have improved considerably upon this state of things in our time. Those who indulge in amateur theatricals are not nowadays for the most part composed of stage-struck boys and girls without an atom of ability to recommend them—the class of audiences who were wont to congregate in the gallery of a minor theatre which itself constituted the centre of a stage-struck neighbourhood. With the spread of education, the theatrical tastes of the masses have advanced to an altogether wonderful degree. Audiences no longer find amusement in 'guying' a company of incompetent amateurs; and so the simple stage-struck hero, who might be willing to pay for his folly in the way we have indicated, finds his opportunities gone.

Amateur acting has in our day come to be regarded as an intellectual recreation among all classes of the community. When we find, for example, such a matter-of-fact organization as the Thames Iron Works giving every year a highly-creditable performance of one of the Savoy operas without the slightest professional assistance—all the parts being

sustained by the workmen, foremen, and clerks, together with their wives, sisters, and sweethearts—we must fain conclude that histrionic talent can be met with and cultivated in the most unexpected places. Instead of contenting themselves with worn-out farces, our modern amateurs perform high-class comedies, very often a current or a recent London success. And when, on occasion, a pretty curtain-raiser attracts their notice, it is quickly added to their repertoire. The consequence of all this is that amateurs bring much money into theatrical coffers. They are regular playgoers, while the fees they pay go to swell the incomes of the dramatists.

There is not the slightest doubt that amateur theatricals, in one form or another, have been largely instrumental in raising the stage to its present proud position. The old prejudices against the profession are rapidly disappearing before the broader views which a better acquaintance with theatrical affairs is spreading abroad. Since acting has become fashionable, we hear far less of the alleged immorality which was formerly thrust into the teeth of ‘men and women merely players.’

Certain it is that amateur clubs and private theatricals have largely fed the professional stage during the last two decades. To the familiar charge that the wholesale invasion of the profession by amateurs is to be deprecated, we will let Mrs. Kendal furnish an answer. ‘I do not think,’ she says, ‘that amateurs take the bread out of other people’s mouths.



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Since amateurs have come upon the stage, they have brought with them an immense amount of good. Look at the hundreds and hundreds of nice young girls—and young men too—who, with regard to personal qualifications, are certainly gifted for the theatre. It is perfectly wonderful the different people that I see who wish to come upon the stage, and I always encourage them to do so.' Mrs. Kendal, no doubt, refers only to those whom she meets in society. We should not ourselves be so eager to persuade the less wealthy to such a step.

The new school of acting—call it the 'cup and saucer school' if you will—has entirely displaced the mouthing and ranting of the old school, thanks, perhaps, to the fact that so many of our modern actors and actresses were themselves amateurs in the past. The list of these is a very long one. We can only cite a few of the best-known names: Mr. Beer-bohm Tree, Mr. George Alexander, Mr. J. L. Toole, Mr. A. W. Pinero, Mr. F. A. Macklin, Mr. Harry Paulton, Mr. Henry Bedford, Mr. George Giddens, Mr. Yorke Stephens, Mr. Arthur Cecil, Mr. James Welch, Mr. Harry Monckhouse, Mr. Charles Collette, Mr. Brandon Thomas, Mr. J. H. Barnes, Mr. F. R. Benson, Mr. W. C. Day, Mr. Edward Terry, Mr. Templar Saxe, Mr. H. H. Morell; Lady Monckton, Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. Brown - Potter, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Miss Olga Nethersole, Miss Maud Millett, Miss Kate Phillips, Miss Edith Chester, Miss Gertrude Kingston, Miss Eleanor Leyshon, Miss Lenore Snyder, and Miss Eastlake.

## Players by Profession.

Of course, it must not be imagined that because all these, and many more, acquired a rudimentary knowledge of their art on amateur boards, they were spared the trials and disappointments which follow in the wake of the player by profession. Far from it. Every one of them could conjure up recollections of long spells of inactivity, or playing to 'a beggarly array of empty benches,' with small prospect of drawing their well-merited honorarium at the week's close. A glance at the 'professional cards' set forth in the *Era* and the *Stage*, or a visit to any one of the agents' offices in the vicinity of the Strand, would convince an outsider that, however much salaries have increased in our day, there are times and seasons when a dramatic *artiste* earns nothing at all. Some actors and actresses appear by their own showing to be always 'resting,' 'at liberty,' or 'disengaged.' Under the old order, engagements held good for long periods, often for a number of years. Now they obtain 'for the run of the piece,' which, in the event of a failure, may mean a few nights only. It is not at all unusual for a company, after giving three weeks' rehearsals to a new play, to find that it will not hold the boards. An artistic success the production may be, but if it does not draw the public, the theatre closes its doors, and the company is disbanded, most of them being put to the exercise of their wits in quest of another engagement.

‘To waylay a man as he goes in; to scheme for an introduction to another who doesn’t want to know you; to submit to rudeness and disguise privation under well-cut clothes; to smile in the Strand, and break your heart in private, are the essential preliminaries to success on the stage unless you have money, or your father was a good actor’—such is the keynote of Mr. Leonard Merrick’s powerful novel, ‘The Actor-Manager.’ There must be many actors who can re-echo this sentiment with a feeling heart. ‘Anything in prospect?’ we heard a faultlessly-attired actor ask his companion in a Strand restaurant a few days ago. ‘Absolutely nothing!’ was the reply, delivered with an aristocratic drawl. ‘But I don’t mind very much,’ he continued. ‘My people allow me a decent income, and I have always a good home to go back to when I’m tired of waiting for my chance, which never seems to come.’

Truly, a little money is a useful thing, especially to an actor in or out of an engagement; for let it never be forgotten that actors have so many inducements to run through their incomes of which those outside the profession know nothing. ‘I have a salary of £12 a week at the Blank Theatre, yet I can’t save a halfpenny,’ was the confidential admission of a popular light comedian quite recently. To make a position on the stage, and uphold it when made, one must dress well, spend money at theatrical haunts where intelligence is to be gathered, belong to a club or two, mix freely in society, discard soiled



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gloves, and avoid contact with the dust of the street by much cab-riding. Little wonder that the shabby-genteel actors of the old school cannot enter into competition with the gentlemen players of the new ! The world is ever progressive ; we must march with the times. Let the dramatic aspirant, therefore, take all these actualities into consideration before he makes the fatal plunge.

### The Playgoer as Critic.

We have said above that amateurs are regular playgoers ; that it is the natural outcome of studying parts for which popular actors and actresses serve as models. The dramatic aspirant cannot be a too frequent visitor to the play. By watching a performance carefully, one can learn much more about stage technique than by private study, or by wholesale drilling on the boards. The failings and shortcomings of inartistic actors soon become apparent to playgoers who are at all critically inclined. Some people are critics by nature. Dr. Westland Marston tells us in his 'Recollections' how, even at his first visit to the play, he was led to wonder why Mr. Almar, the leading actor at Sadler's Wells, made such an incessant use of his arms. 'Now they were antithetically extended, the one skyward, the other earthward, like the sails of a windmill ; now they were folded sternly across his bosom ; now raised in denunciation ; now clasped in entreaty, and considerably maintained in their positions long enough

to impress the entire audience at leisure with the effect intended. I was critical enough to ask myself whether the more heroic attitudes of this gentleman could not have been heightened by the contrast of occasional repose, and whether there were, in his opinion, any fatal incompatibility between easy and natural gestures and effective acting.' The difficulty of what to do with the hands is best mastered by studying the methods of actors and actresses who have learned, by long experience, to overcome it.

### A Seat in the Orchestra.

It would be an excellent thing for the aspirant if he could secure an engagement for a time as an instrumentalist in a theatre orchestra, or, failing that, he might with advantage accept a humble position in front of the house. The orchestra and attendants, who see the same play every night, soon learn to form a judgment of good and indifferent acting. J. B. Buckstone had an abiding faith in the critical acumen of his orchestra. When any new 'business' was introduced, he was not above taking their opinion on it; and at the last rehearsal of a new play, he felt satisfied that if *they* appeared to like it, it would win a favourable reception from the public. John Emery, the famous impersonator of stage countrymen, was in his youth a violin-player at the Brighton Theatre.

It was due to his musical attainments that Benjamin Webster obtained an appearance on the

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London boards. To quote his own words: 'At the age of nineteen I had the misfortune to marry a widow with a ready-made family, which was like going into the battle of life with a millstone round my neck. I applied to Mr. Beverley, of the Tottenham Street Theatre, for walking gentleman. "Full." "For little business and utility." "Full." "For harlequin and dancing?" "Don't do pantomime or ballet; besides, don't like male dancers." "For the orchestra?" "Well," said he, "just now you were a walking gentleman!" "So I am, sir; but I have had a musical education, and necessity compels me to turn it to account." On a violin being produced, I was engaged as leader of the orchestra at a guinea a week. Had a storm of gold fallen on me, it could not have delighted Semele more than me. I resolved to walk to Croydon—ten miles—every day to rehearsal, and back to Shoreditch, on twopence a day—one pennyworth of oatmeal and one pennyworth of milk—and I did it for six weeks, Sundays excepted, when I indulged in the luxury of shin of beef and ox-cheek. At the end of the sixth week I had so pleased Mr. Beverley that I was asked to give a sailor's hornpipe. I dashed on the stage, got through the double shuffle, though feeling faint; but at last, despite every effort, I broke down through sheer exhaustion, and the curtain dropped on me and my hopes.' However, it was not long before Mr. Beverley gave him a regular engagement as walking gentleman, and he made his first appearance in London as Henry Morland in



*The Heir at Law.* His subsequent performance as Pompey in *Measure for Measure* made a great hit, whereupon he was engaged to play leading parts with Madame Vestris at the Olympic Theatre. ['Refuse nothing!' is a motto to be serviceably acted upon in the dramatic profession; it has frequently laid the foundations of a successful career. Edwin Forrest once accepted the humble position of gasman in an American theatre, but with thus inserting the thin end of the wedge he was well content, for very soon he was offered a part in the place of an actor who threw up his engagement. When the future Sir Augustus Harris waited upon Mr. Edgar Bruce, offering to play anything from 'lead' down to 'general utility,' he was emphatically informed that no opening of any kind could be found for him. 'Come now, Mr. Bruce,' said he, 'will you let me stay till rehearsal is over, and then if we look through the scrip, I think we'll be able to find some sort of small part I could play?' 'Quite impossible!' was the reply; 'I have a lot of correspondence to attend to as soon as I can get away from the stage.' 'Then it is very clear you must want a secretary; I'll stop and write your letters for you,' returned the irrepressible 'Gussy.' His services were accepted, and in the course of that secretarial appointment he learned the details of management. Miss Wadman made it a point never to refuse a part, however small, so long as she could remain in the bill; to this she owed her two and a half years' engagement at the Gaiety Theatre.]

## Modern Actor-Musicians.

Mr. Oscar Barrett developed a genius for stage management while wielding the *bâton* at the conductor's desk at the Grecian Theatre, and afterwards at Drury Lane. M. Auguste van Biene was for years a violoncellist in the theatre orchestra. Seated in his accustomed corner, he had an uncontrollable desire to play the part of Rip Van Winkle after a style of his own ; much better, as he promised himself, than certain actors who won applause in it. At last he hazarded the experiment, and succeeded even beyond his expectations. Since then he has written, or caused to be written, a couple of comedy-dramas—'The Broken Melody' and 'A Musician's Romance'—around his violoncello, with which he now 'stars' the provinces. Mr. George Rignold was originally engaged in the orchestra at the Swansea Theatre, at the same time as his brother William played utility parts on the stage. So much alike were they that it was next to impossible to know one from the other, and often, for a bit of sport, they exchanged places, the manager remaining in ignorance of the proceeding, until one night the real actor's blundering over an unrehearsed entr'acte suddenly revealed the true state of affairs.

An apt illustration of the advantage of a nightly seat in the orchestra will be found in our 'Roughing-it on the Stage.' A young actor who was none too successful on the boards, at length accepted an



engagement as a cornet-player with a touring company. He had not acted for a twelvemonth at the time we made his acquaintance, but that caused him small concern. Said he, 'I'm ready to play a part at any time, and much better, too, than if I had never taken up with my cornet. Depend upon it, the best way for a novice to learn his business is to watch the stage from the orchestra. By attending the rehearsals, and paying close attention to the piece "at night," he can get ideas about acting such as would never enter into the heads of the actors themselves.' F. B. Chatterton, the Drury Lane manager, was in his youth a skilled harpist in the theatre orchestra; and there was a time, long years ago, when he filled the onerous position of an attendant in front of the house at the National Theatre.

### Amateurs v. Novices.

It goes without saying that a little amateur experience cannot but be serviceable in assisting the aspirant to obtain a footing on professional boards. Agents and managers are very chary of novices; to amateurs, particularly if they have a few flattering press notices to display, they are more condescending. Raw novices have ere now insinuated themselves into country engagements under the pretence of being experienced amateurs, and speedily fallen into disgrace. 'No novices; have had a bitter experience with several lately, and don't want any more,' is the typical tag to a country manager's advertisement for

'useful people' in the theatrical journals. Amateurs and novices are often confounded in professional parlance. Incompetent would-be actors, whose failure brings utter ruin upon a performance, are indiscriminately dubbed 'amateurs'—with a sanguinary adjective. But these are novices pure and simple. An amateur, at least, though he may not be able to *act*, knows how to tread the boards, study his part, and take up his cues. Until he can do these things, he cannot claim to be an amateur, and such a one has no right to seek an engagement on the stage proper.

### Infelicitous First Appearances.

It is not too much to say that the most gifted actors, unless they have had the good fortune to be brought out in a carefully-studied part by a qualified 'coach,' are hopelessly at sea when they face the footlights for the first time. Acting a part with others is a very different thing to delivering a recitation *solus*. The novelty of their situation, the glare of the footlights, the sea of human faces, the excitement of the moment, the strain of recollecting their lines and cues, are so many disturbing elements that effectually mar a first appearance. John Kemble, though the son of an actor-manager and the brother of the celebrated Mrs. Siddons—his father had sent him to Douay to study for the priesthood, but he ran away and joined a company of strolling players—did not acquit himself at all well on the occasion of

his *début*. Nor did he make amends for his shortcomings for long afterwards ; indeed, he was described by his colleagues as ‘a stick on the stage, but a perfect gentleman off it.’ George Anne Bellamy, a tragedy queen of a former day, was so overcome by nervousness on the first night that the curtain had perforce to be dropped ; when, after an interval, it was raised again, she mustered courage to speak, but her voice was inaudible. And the same might be said of many an actor and actress who ultimately created a very different impression. We have ourselves a vivid recollection of the agonies of forgetting our opening line, and all the rest, the instant we stepped on the boards, perfect though we were in the test before that memorable first appearance.

### The Story of a *Début*.

The following graphic description of an ambitious novice’s sensations in the part of Hamlet at the Theatre Royal, Paisley, is culled from ‘The Confessions of a Strolling Player,’ already referred to :

‘Now came the eventful moment. “Clear the stage!” was shouted by the manager ; and at last the curtain was rung up. All this time, from the minute I left the dressing-room, and while the ladies and gentlemen of the company strutted about in the costumes appropriate to their parts, I began to experience a growing queerness, and felt the coming on of that awful sensation which I had so often ridiculed in others, known to the initiated as “stage-



fright." As the first brief scene went on, and Francisco spoke about the weather, etc., the feeling increased; and when I was pushed into my place to be "discovered," along with the Queen and Court, I felt much inclined to run away, and leave histrionic greatness to be achieved by others who had greater nerve. But there they all were—escape impossible; besides, I question if the state of my knees would have permitted my legs to have performed their functions.

'When the stony ramparts of Elsinore drew asunder, and the audience beheld "Scene II.—A Room of State in the Castle," there was a welcoming round of applause in honour of the new Hamlet, who all the time was standing as if he were in instant expectation of being hanged. The state of my feelings during these brief moments cannot be described; I felt unutterably helpless. All the combined evils that were ever heaped on the devoted head of any poor human being could, I thought, be nothing to what I suffered at the moment when it came to my turn to speak. I was letter-perfect in the part of Hamlet, and had frequently galloped over every word of it from beginning to end. Indeed, I knew the whole tragedy by heart—every sentence was coursing vividly before me—but I was suddenly struck dumb, and could make no utterance. Cold drops of sweat ran down my back, my head felt on fire, my knees were decidedly uneasy, my eyes grew glassy, the sea of human heads before me seemed converted into one great petrified face—and, oh! how horribly hard it looked at me—seeming to read

my very soul. I tried to shut my eyes, but the gigantic head, with hundreds of penetrating eyes, still glared on me. At one moment it seemed as if it would melt with compassion, and then it became fixed with an icy contemptuous smile that seemed to refuse all sympathy, and mock at me. Then a new feeling came over me. I felt as if all that was taking place was no concern of mine—nothing to me individually. I did not understand it. I was in the land of unconsciousness—far away in Dreamland—and my mind was blank. I did not even think; I had become a statue immovable, but with just the breath of life in me. In a moment again I woke up—I tried to concentrate my thoughts—my eyes brightened, and I gazed into the audience; tried to look unusually mild, philosophic, and intellectual. I succeeded to some extent in this, as I fancied; but, as I have since been told, I only attained the position of looking unutterably foolish.

‘Again and again my cue was given, but I heeded it not. Answer made he none; no sound issued from the deep chest of the “inky Dane.” He was too silent. My lips moved, but my voice was frozen. I felt choked up. My legs quivered and quavered, and silently danced a quick, shaky kind of movement. The prompter cried out the beginning of my part several times—

“A little more——”

but my only reply was a hopeless, helpless stare. I looked, and looked, and looked at the audience,



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but the fact was, all memory had fled. I *felt* what I had to say, but could not speak it. The audience began to get impatient and hiss. All at once a thought of home came vividly across me, and, glancing at my sombre dress, I said to myself, as I thought: "What would my mother say to this if she saw me making such an infernal fool of myself?"

'I shall never forget the roar that took place, for, instead of merely thinking these words, I had *spoken* them—they unwittingly found vocal expression—and the audience shouted with excitement. The company, losing all sense of propriety, first tittered, and then joined heartily in the general roar; and I, looking first one way and then another, bolted off the stage as hard as I could amid a renewed shout from the whole audience.

'And so ended my first appearance on any stage.'

### Stage-Fright.

Mr. Charles Wyndham is not likely to forget his opening night with Mr. John Wood's company in America. He had to make his entrance with a light-hearted speech commencing, 'I am drunk with love and enthusiasm.' But he never got beyond 'I am drunk!' There he incontinently stuck. The management dispensed with his services that evening. Mr. John Hare was actually hissed on his first appearance for his seeming incompetence. Mr. Thomas Thorne unhappily mistook his cue to make his first entrance, and completely spoilt a pathetic scene.

Mr. J. D. Beveridge was unceremoniously discharged at the end of a week's trial as 'utterly incompetent,' his deficiency arising from nothing more than stage-fright. Mr. Charles Danby was declared to be 'a duffer,' and cashiered on the very first night; the manager, however, suffered him to remain on condition of having his salary materially reduced. Mr. Leonard Boyne only held on to his initial engagement by submitting to having his salary cut down three shillings a week. Cast for one of the six bridesmaids in *Hunted Lives*, Miss Georgie Esmond was so overcome by nervousness that she fell down in sight of the audience. Miss Cissy Grahame—the daughter of a well-known provincial actress—did a plucky thing at the Theatre Royal, Hull, by offering to take the part of an actress who was suddenly indisposed. She meant well, but facing the foot-lights so utterly unnerved her that not one word of the text was heard by those friends in front.

### The Opera Chorus.

These things considered, the aspirant who has not had the slightest experience as an amateur would be well advised to avoid seeking an engagement that involves the delivery of a set phrase of words. He should begin at the very beginning. Has he a good singing voice? If so, his course is easy. Let him take the necessary steps to enter the opera chorus. By addressing the musical director at a theatre devoted to comic opera or light musical plays, an

appointment would most likely be made for him to attend on a certain day to have his voice tried. Such examinations have long been an institution at the Savoy Theatre. The successful applicants are sent for and permanently engaged as vacancies arise in Mr. D'Oyly Carte's touring companies; but those who have quietly had the ominous letters 'N.G.' ('No Good') placed against their names, trouble that theatre no more. Elsewhere, the impending production of a new comic opera or musical play affords the applicant the most fitting opportunity of gaining a hearing. If he reside in the provinces, he might address the musical director of a touring company (not dramatic) for permission to undergo a vocal test during its sojourn in the town.

The best London agents have almost always openings for 'ladies and gentlemen of the chorus' in operas and musical pieces about to be exploited or sent round the country. It is well to know, however, that the so-called 'musical and dramatic agents' that congregate in York Road and Stamford Street are essentially music-hall agents; they have no business connections with theatres. Some others of the same class will also be found in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden. Really serviceable *dramatic* agents are few and far between, though many exist that might be described as shady. Established agents of repute never advertise for 'people in all lines of business, also choristers and ladies of the ballet,' the favourite device of the professional schemer, who counts upon an immediate rush of



'clients' ready to part with a booking fee. Preliminary fees for booking new names have latterly been abolished by the *bonâ-fide* dramatic agent. Of course, a direct introduction or a musician's letter of recommendation would be very helpful, but it is not essential. A first-class agent is generally willing to open up business with a person of good address who can show some capacity for the profession he or she wishes to enter. In the opera chorus, as we have said above, there are almost always openings for a beginner, either in town or country.

The amateur, as well as the mere novice, may be profitably recommended to seek a legitimate introduction to the stage as a chorister. There are abundant opportunities of working up one's way from the chorus. In a touring company the minor parts of the curtain-raiser are invariably sustained by the more talented members of the chorus. Moreover, the excellent drilling received at the hands of the stage-manager is invaluable to those who desire to step to higher things. That sterling farcical comedian, Mr. Sydney Barraclough, commenced his theatrical career as a chorister in *Frivoli* at Drury Lane, and later in *La Bernaise* at the Prince of Wales's, now Prince's Theatre. Nor must it be forgotten that Mr. Harry Grattan, also in the chorus, on several occasions played Mr. Arthur Roberts' part in *The Old Guard* at the Avenue Theatre at a moment's notice, an achievement which did much to advance his professional interests, as it



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deserved to do. Mr. Curtice Pounds obtained his first engagement during the run of *Patience* in the Savoy chorus, his well-trained voice causing him to be at the same time selected as understudy for Mr. Rutland Barrington and Mr. Durwood Lely. The following year he was given a part to play in *Iolanthe*; now he is an established Savoy favourite. Mons. Marius was originally a 'super' at the Folies Dramatiques, Paris; from that humble position he entered the chorus, and presently rose to the dignity of small parts.

### 'Walking Parts.'

The would-be actor who does not possess a good singing voice should not be too proud to learn his business by accepting what is called a 'walking part.' There is nothing derogatory in commencing as a supernumerary. The traditional 'super' has almost been improved off the West-End boards. No longer do we find 'the man in the street' decked out in a dress-suit that ill becomes him. The 'Adelphi guests,' who formerly were a fit object of ridicule for the gallery boys, have been ousted by educated young men and women calculated to do credit to a drawing-room scene. Mr. Beerbohm Tree has had briefless barristers content to 'walk on' the stage during his management of the Haymarket Theatre. The Lyceum and Princess's supernumeraries are for the most part old stagers who have come down in the world. The 'howling mob' in a Drury Lane melodrama may still be composed of sandwich men

and the like, but these are altogether absent from a sumptuously-furnished 'interior set.'\*

## The Stage 'Super.'

The stage-manager's art has made very rapid strides of late in the matter of picturesque *tout ensemble*, a lesson learned originally from the Meiningen Court Company at Drury Lane Theatre in 1881. In those memorable performances of *Julius Cæsar*, scores of German clerks took part as 'the populace,' for Art's own sake. The result of their careful drilling was a revelation to our native stage-managers. Real soldiers are now largely requisitioned in spectacular productions; for *The Harbour Lights* at the Adelphi and the revival of *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the Savoy Theatre naval contingents were engaged. Indeed, the day is not far distant when 'the great unwashed' will figure as stage 'supers' no more. This may be bad for the 'super,' but it is certainly good for the theatre. During the run of *A Million of Money* at Drury Lane, Sir Augustus Harris suddenly took it into his head to replace his 'supers' with discharged soldiers. Much about the same

\* An interesting experiment was made in May, 1898, at a Paris theatre, on the production of *Les Tisserands*. To impart the utmost realism to a certain scene, the manager introduced a 'real mob' of beggars, tramps, and loafers. He addressed them before the curtain rose, 'Don't shout, all of you, the same thing; call out whatever you like!' The spontaneity of their cries, it is said, was vastly relished by the lovers of the 'ragamuffin drama.'

time Mrs. Langtry advertised in the *Daily Telegraph* for 'one hundred men, all discharged soldiers, five feet ten inches high, and clean-shaven,' to act as auxiliaries in *Antony and Cleopatra* at the St. James's Theatre. The mute performers in the spectacular productions at Barnum's show, Olympia, in 1890 and 1897 were soldiers to a man. The advantages of this new departure in the former year were thus explained by Mr. Barnum himself:

'Soldiers serving in the ranks make the best and the most reliable "supers." They are all marched into the building together, and out again, under the charge of their own officer. This saves me from the annoyance of having a crowd of "supers" loafing around a long time before they are wanted, others straggling in late, often the worse for drink, others not showing up at all. They are never awkward and ungainly, no matter what character they are called upon to sustain. The strict discipline to which they are used makes them civil to all around them, and they can be depended upon to do what is required without need of oaths and bad language on the part of the stage-manager. But perhaps their highest recommendation is their personal cleanliness, in striking contrast to the regular theatre "super." My men are paid good money, but their earnings are not handed to them direct, but to the officer in charge, who banks it to their credit at the barracks, so that after their engagement is finished they have a decent sum to draw as pocket-money when they get their furloughs.'



‘Extra Ladies and Gentlemen.’

Still, however reliable soldier ‘supers’ may be in a general way, they are hardly considered the correct thing in a society play. It is just here where a ‘walking part’ offers itself most conveniently to the seeker after stage experience. Many now popular actors and actresses gained confidence behind the footlights in ‘walking parts.’ Miss Beatrice Lamb was one of the stately guests in the first act of *The Red Lamp* at the Comedy Theatre. Miss Evelyn Millard simply ‘walked on’ in *The Dancing Girl* at the Haymarket Theatre, but subsequently joined Miss Sarah Thorne’s company at Margate to gain experience in ‘speaking parts.’ It was not very long before she there essayed such ambitious characters as Juliet, Hero, Pauline, and with so much success that Mr. Thomas Thorne, the brother of the Margate manageress, engaged her to play the name-part in *Sophia* on tour. Mr. Fred Terry confesses that he accepted a ‘walking part’ at £1 a week at the Haymarket under the Bancrofts. Mr. Mark Kinghorne made his first appearance on any stage as a spearsman in a Strand burlesque. As we have said already, Mons. Marius commenced life as a ‘super.’ Mr. Frank Wyatt did not disdain to accept a one-line servant’s part in *On Bail* at the Criterion, Mr. Wyndham offering him five shillings in excess of the usual salary for such parts on account of his ‘extra intelligence.’ Little did the latter imagine



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that the possessor of that 'extra intelligence' would one day rival him as a popular light comedian and a manager to boot.

*En passant*, Mr. Charles Wyndham lately entered an indignant protest against a statement made by Mr. Clement Scott, in which it was suggested that many years ago the Criterion manager played a mere 'super's' part in the burlesque of *Black-Ey'd Susan* at the Royalty Theatre. The true version of the indictment turned out to be that Mr. Wyndham sustained one of the three principal characters in the entertainment, but Messrs. Dewar and Danvers were so funny in it that they reduced him, by comparison, to the level of a 'super.' One sentence in Mr. Wyndham's letter to the *Daily Telegraph* was characteristic of the man. Said he, 'Now, there is no discredit in being a "super"; the lower the rung of the ladder one steps on, the better one learns to climb.' An excellent dictum!

Benjamin Webster once found himself in Paris without a sou in his pocket, and with the veriest make-believe of a shirt in the shape of a collar and a 'dickey.' In this sad plight he sought an engagement as a 'super' at a Boulevard theatre. The play in which he appeared was a military drama founded on the life of Napoleon, and a fancied resemblance to that great man caused him to be selected for an apotheosis of 'the Little Corporal' ascending to heaven with the King of Rome. Out of the mute inglorious part thus sustained in the days of his adversity, he in after-years made much capital on

the London boards in a little play entitled *The Pretty Girls of Stillberg*; by turning his back to the audience and doing something to his coat, hat, and wig, he suddenly stood revealed as the great Napoleon.

### The One-Line Actor.

The one-line actor not unfrequently earns his meed of applause; ay, and there have been instances in which the delivery of a single word has literally brought down the house. To such a one Mrs. Kendal has borne witness in her 'Dramatic Opinions.' 'I have often been asked,' she writes, 'whether actors who play minor parts conspicuously well spring suddenly into more prominent positions. The question reminds me of an incident which occurred in a play by Arthur Sketchley, the well-known author of the "Mrs. Brown" series. He had written a three-act drama called *Blanche*, which my husband and I, on tour at the time, were playing at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool. The plot was taken from an old French drama, and depended on a woman being falsely accused of poisoning her husband. It was very hard work, I remember, for everyone concerned. In the last scene, when the villain steps forward and denounces the heroine with the words, "You poisoned your husband! I saw you put the poison in the glass at such and such a time," a black manservant comes forward and says "Liar!" I am sorry to say that this was the only occasion for genuine applause throughout the play. So great was the

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success of this minor actor that he immediately jumped into a most prominent position in the provinces, and became a leading man. Whether he has kept his position till now I do not know, for I have lost sight of him.'

### 'Writing-in' to Managers.

If only embryo actors and actresses could be persuaded to curb their ambition at the outset, their chances of obtaining a first appearance would be more favourable than they are with the large majority of their kind. A becoming modesty is a commendable factor on such occasions.

Miss Florence West communicated to Mr. Toole her ardent desire to become an actress, trusting he might be able to assist her. The genial comedian simply replied that he was afraid she must be numbered among the stage-struck damsels whose chances of success in an already overcrowded profession were exceedingly remote. She, however, returned to the charge with the avowal that she had not the slightest wish to play Juliet, Pauline, or any other ambitious character, but would be perfectly willing to go through all the successive grades that might fall within the province of a humble beginner. So pleased was the actor-manager with the modesty of her aspirations that he at once engaged her for the part of Mary Belton in *Uncle Dick's Darling*.

Mr. James Welch has told the members of the Playgoers' Club how he planted his foot on the



professional ladder. Said he: ‘I was given a start, helped, and encouraged, as perhaps not one actor in five hundred is. I had been working away as an amateur for some years, and tried hard to get what I considered a good start—that is, in a company with a manager where I could get a sound and varied experience—for I felt that such a start would be worth more to me than five years’ hard work in an inferior company. I wrote to almost every manager who visited my native town, all to no purpose; almost the only one who had a kind word for me was Mr. Toole. Of course the interview made no impression on him, and he most likely forgot it the next day. At last I wrote to Mr. Wilson Barrett; I had no introduction to him, and he, needless to say, had not the slightest knowledge of me. I saw him after the performance; he had been playing Claudian, and was still in his stage-dress. A very timid knock at the dressing-room door was answered by a most reassuring “Come in!” and I was shaking hands with the man whose one performance of Chatterton, not to mention all his other fine work, should make his name live. “Now tell me what you can do,” said Mr. Barrett. “Well,” said I, “I couldn’t play Claudian. I’m afraid if I tried the part, I should be the one actor who had ever completely failed in Hamlet. What I hope some day to be is a character comedian, and to gain experience to that end I am willing to become a “super” in your company at, say, fifteen shillings a week.” “Well, put your name and address in that book.”



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"Ah!" thought I, "the old story: If I hear of anything I'll let you know;" but as I put down the pen Mr. Barrett said, "I tell you what I'll do: I'll give you a part in my pantomime at Leeds." The contract—not at fifteen shillings a week, either—was signed. Imagine my astonishment when a few days later a letter came asking me if I would prefer being with him in his London company! So I came to town. My five years of hard labour *had* been saved. My part was an excellent one, that of a boy-clerk in *The Golden Ladder*. I came on at the beginning of the second act, Mr. Barrett not being on the scene for at least another ten minutes. Yet he, with all the care and worry of a new production on his mind—a new venture at a new theatre—his old position to get back in town, for he had been on his first long American tour—yet he, I say, found time to come round to the far entrance, where I was waiting to go on, shake hands with me, and wish me every possible success in my new life. "I've put your foot on the first rung of the ladder," he added; "let us hope it will really be a golden ladder for you." My cue came, and was it any wonder that those words cheered me up to do my best? The little scene over, I came off, and was walking away, when I felt a firm hand on my shoulder, while one of the kindest voices in the world said, "Oh, you *must* listen to your first round of applause," no doubt inventing one for me, for I was too dazed to realize anything but that I was in Fairyland. That kindness and thoughtfulness Mr. Barrett showed to me and every

member of his company, and I will venture to say that there is not one actor or actress who has been under his management but could testify to the encouragement and sympathetic help they have received at his hands.'

### The Bottom Rung.

In the old stock-company days the 'intelligent "super"' was never entrusted with a speaking line or two. That would have caused dire jealousy among his fellows, and, moreover, would have been an encroachment on the ordinary business of the 'utility gentleman.' We have all heard the story told of the 'super' whose ambition to be something more than a mute was never gratified. He had served the management long and faithfully; still, that cherished speaking line was persistently denied him. At length he resolved to improvise an opportunity of distinguishing himself. Stepping down to the footlights, he electrified the house with a grandiloquent delivery of this virtuous sentiment, more or less appropriate to the action that had gone before: 'The man who would lay his hand upon a woman, save in an act of kindness, is a wretch whom it would be a gross flattery to call a coward!' He received a round of applause, followed by his instant dismissal from the theatre.

Things are different nowadays. Stage-managers give their supernumeraries every encouragement to improve themselves. The 'super' who can say, 'My

lord, the carriage waits!' with becoming dignity is speedily promoted. He is made 'understudy' for the small 'utility actor,' who has, perhaps, half a dozen one-line parts in one and the same play. All the parts in a modern production are understudied, from the highest down to the lowest. Consequently, in the event of an actor or actress failing to appear, there is—particularly on tour—a general exchange of parts, and so the lines of the least important member of the company may be delivered by the most intelligent 'super.' In first-class touring organizations, the 'supers' are permanently attached to the company; hence it follows that they are of a vastly superior order than used to obtain when they were picked up 'for six nights only' in the various towns visited. But by calling these 'supers' we are, perhaps, doing them an injustice. They love to style themselves 'extra gentlemen,' or 'amateur comedians,' and 'extra ladies.'

### Understudies.

In a London production the understudies are often committed to those who simply 'walk on,' or, if there is a dearth of 'walking parts,' the supplementary performers are expected to report themselves at the theatre every evening in case the need for their services should arise. The understudy's lot is not usually a happy one, yet when at last his or her chance comes round, it makes ample amends for months of weary waiting.



Generally speaking, understudies for the principals are not provided until the play has proved an assured success, and then some unimportant member of the company may win honourable distinction by playing a leading part at a moment's notice. Mr. Wilson Barrett, when quite a beginner, made his first hit by promptly stepping into the breach when the 'leading juvenile' was unable to play his part through drinking 'not wisely, but too well.' Mr. Laurence Cautley entirely owed his professional advancement to an accident which befell Mr. Kyrle Bellew on the first night of *Mankind* at the Globe Theatre. He offered to continue the injured actor's part on the spur of the moment, and thus saved the management from a dilemma. Miss Grace Hawthorne emerged from the disappointments of understudying parts which she was never called upon to play by successfully taking the place of the leading lady, who fell ill. After this achievement she was cast for the heroine in the play next in the order of production. The temptation to keep on quoting similar instances of unlooked-for opportunities of mounting the professional ladder is very great, but we have no desire to needlessly occupy our space with them.

Miss Loie Fuller's first success came about in a still more singular manner. She actually made her *début* by such a fluke. All her efforts to obtain a footing on the boards had proved futile. Almost in despair, she strolled into the pit of a New York theatre one night to see an actress play a part of which she had herself made a careful study. The



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first piece over, the manager came forward to announce that the popular actress could not appear owing to sudden indisposition, and, as no substitute could be found, it would be necessary to change the play. Thereupon Miss Fuller went round to the stage-door, and sent in word to the manager that she was quite ready to sustain the part. Her proffered service was gladly accepted. She acquitted herself admirably, and offers of engagements poured in upon her.

Truly, 'there is a tide in the affairs of men that, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.' In the theatrical profession such opportunities come to everyone sooner or later. It only rests with individual talent to make the most of them.

### Touring Companies.

The amateur actor—note the qualification, the *amateur*, not the novice—can often secure for himself an engagement in a first-class touring company by offering his services in a subordinate part for a nominal salary or no salary at all. Obviously, this presupposes that he has a little money or friends to fall back upon. His travelling expenses would, of course, be covered. The addresses *en route* of theatrical companies 'on the road' are always to be found on the 'Companies' Page' in the *Era* and the *Stage*. Or he might write to the London manager of the latest success, asking him to register his name in view of the time when the play is to be sent on

tour. The country rights of a new play may, however, be at once snapped up by an established touring manager, in which event it would be necessary to address that manager direct. Messrs. Gatti retain all rights in their productions, their provincial companies being rehearsed by their own stage-manager at the Adelphi Theatre. The *artistes* they have engaged for the tour are expected to give a faithful imitation of the original exponents of the drama, down to the minutest detail. Night after night, as long as the rehearsals are in progress, will their 'specially-selected London company' be found seated in various parts of the house carefully watching the play, and taking in all the 'points' that win applause from pit and gallery. A new reading of a part will not be tolerated. The least attempt at originality might endanger an enthusiastic performer's engagement. This is in many respects bad for dramatic art, but it is a natural concomitant of the touring system. The like remarks apply to other West-End managers who send out their own provincial companies.

On the other hand, where a country manager purchases the provincial rights of the latest London success, actors with ideas of their own have more latitude; though it may happen that the author travels down to the first town visited in order to superintend the final rehearsals.

## Playing a Part Many Times.

Yet, after all, playing the same part round the provinces every night for two or three years is not the kind of valuable experience that was to be commanded in the old stock-company days. Long runs in London are often pleasantly varied by special matinée performances for copyright purposes, while individual members of the company may be released from their engagements to take part in new productions at other Metropolitan theatres. Such diversions never fall to the lot of the actor in a touring company. Constant repetition of his one part soon palls. He loses all interest in it; goes through it mechanically, and comes to regard it as a nightly toil for his daily bread.

Playing a part a great many times without change is anything but an unmixed blessing. Mr. Beerbohm Tree has told us in a recent lecture how 'the long run has a deleterious effect upon an actor, because it stifles ambition, it induces slovenliness of performances, and after a time that dreadful lack of interest in his work which is the greatest bar to true artistic achievement.' Mr. A. W. Pinero admits that his interest in the part he played in the Lyceum production of *The Merchant of Venice* rapidly declined after the first few weeks. But the longest run is as nothing compared with the monotony of a 'starring' tour with a single play. Miss Minnie Palmer played the part of Tina in *My Sweetheart* for four years



without a single working night's break, in the course of which long period she grew so weary of it that as soon as she married her manager, Mr. John R. Rogers, she positively declined to do so any longer.

Writing in the *Jacksonville Citizen*, Walker Whiteside relates a professional chat he once had with Edwin Booth. He says: 'Our talk led round to the psychological effect of often repeating the same text in plays that might be presented, as was required in many times presenting the same character. Referring to one of the best-known actors of the day, who is still alive, and whose principal part was an altogether sensible one, Mr. Booth said that he had played the part for so many years that eventually it became impossible for him to remember at times during the play whether he was next to go on in the first or the last act,\* and it was actually impracticable for him to have his mind off the play during its progress, lest he should go on with the wrong words. He was in constant fear of insanity, and he frequently telegraphed his friend, Mr. Booth, to come to him. When Booth was free to go he did so, and on reaching his friend he would be greeted with the exclamation, "Well, Ned, it has come at last. I am going crazy, sure, this time." Mr. Booth said that he would stay with his friend, would drive

\* After playing William in *Black-Ey'd Susan* two thousand times, T. P. Cooke one night came to a sudden stop, but an old playgoer in the gallery loudly gave him the 'missing word.' 'Thank you, mess-mate,' said Cooke in acknowledgment; 'you know a man's memory can't last for ever.'



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and dine with him, tell him funny stories, and actually go on to the stage with him, and constantly use every endeavour to cheer him up. Mr. Booth also referred to the case of the comedian Fox, whose part of Humpty Dumpty, which was absolute idiocy, repeated for hours season after season, ultimately drove him to the insane asylum.

‘I asked Mr. Booth what was the effect on him of the lines of Hamlet, which he had repeated hundreds of times. He replied that he had suffered much from it, but that he had no doubt that the sensible nature of the part afforded much relief. He had never suffered anything more than intense weariness from it. Often in the middle of the season he would during the day dread the prospect of going through the same formula in the approaching evening, though his constant aim was to improve in the art. He narrated an instance from his own experience that illustrates his feelings in this part most clearly. He was presenting the play of *Hamlet* at the Chestnut Street Theatre, in Philadelphia, to a packed house. In the midst of the famous soliloquy, two rough-looking and uncultured men, who were seated in one of the upper rows, began to get rather uneasy. Suddenly one of them exclaimed, in a voice that was easily heard in the breathless stillness of the house, “Oh, hell! let’s get out of this.” The audience manifested its great displeasure at the disturbance, but Mr. Booth said that he was compelled to smile, and he added, “I felt like repeating the remark, and applying it to myself.”’

### Disadvantages of the Touring System.

The psychological effect of playing a subordinate part round the country from year's end to year's end may be infinitesimal ; still, from an educational point of view, an engagement of this kind leaves very much to be desired. If an actor possesses the true artistic instinct, he deplores that lack of training which can only be obtained in a hardworking stock company. If, on the other hand, he is a mere lover of pleasure, a touring engagement affords him every facility for enjoying himself. There are no rehearsals to attend, no demands for fresh 'study,' and the easy life he leads induces laziness or a restlessness born of being constantly on the move, and an addiction to 'have a bit on' each important event in the racing calendar. He lives up to the last shilling of his salary ; the thought of saving never arises in his mind. As long as the commercial stability of the manager is to be relied upon, he makes not the slightest attempt to improve his position. He is content to play his one part for an indefinite period without striving after an engagement in a better company producing a superior class of play. The talents of many good actors are often wasted upon plays that are beneath criticism. Such originality as they may possess is suffered to lie dormant ; their ambition is quenched ; they make no effort to mount the ladder of Fame.

Under these conditions the active pursuit of the

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actor's profession is very different to what it was in the old days. Then a young actor had to make his way on the boards by sheer hard work and versatility. His first engagement was at all times difficult to command. He commenced as 'general utility,' playing any part the stage-manager cast him for, often two or three small parts on the same evening. The plays were constantly changed. Rehearsals from ten o'clock until midway in the afternoon, a heavy performance at night, and 'study' until the small hours, constituted the provincial actor's daily programme. He became so well versed in the 'legitimate' that after a couple of years he could play a round of characters at a moment's notice. By serving an apprenticeship to 'general utility,' each new actor discovered the 'line of business' he was best suited for; it was his ambition to get out of 'responsibles' as soon as he possibly could. All the most successful actors of to-day owe their positions to the rough training they underwent in the provinces.

Now, under the touring system, the beginner has no means of discovering his true line of business. He may be engaged for and drilled into a part, and he may succeed in keeping his engagement, or, as like as not, his place is very soon taken by some new-comer for reasons not specified in his fortnight's notice. Scores of young actors are cashiered for alleged 'incompetence,' when, as a matter of fact, they have unwittingly taken up a mistaken line of business. Others, again, fail to make a position for themselves,



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because, for a like reason, they only play their one part passably well, whereas if the chance were afforded them of appearing in a variety of characters, their abilities would be practically put to the test.

Mrs. (now Lady) Bancroft hit the nail on the head when, soon after her retirement from the profession, she wrote in her 'Reminiscences': 'Oh for a few such theatres now as that [the old King Street Theatre, Bristol], or the old Edinburgh Theatre, so admirably governed for years by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wyndham! We should not then have to bewail the fact that there are no longer schools for young actors and actresses to serve, as it were, a proper apprenticeship by playing every line of character in the theatrical pharmacopœia, from farcical comedy to high tragedy, under the direction of an able stage-manager, before settling on the branch of art in which to seek and work for future excellence; just as a general practitioner, after studying the anatomy of the entire human frame, becomes a specialist.'

One effect of the touring system has been the permanent removal from the London boards of many sound, experienced actors who at one time were acknowledged favourites at the so-called minor theatres. The probability of working up their way to a West-End engagement is thus exceedingly remote. 'Out of sight, out of mind.' Metropolitan audiences soon forget an actor who takes to 'the road.' This is why the provincial actor-manager is so anxious to book a date for a week's visit to one of the suburban houses once a year, though, to be



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sure, Suburbia is but the meaner part of theatrical London. Such a one is often prepared to risk his capital in a West-End production for a brief summer season, in order to keep his memory green. The play may fail, but some member of his company may make a hit in a secondary part, with the happy result of having his services requisitioned by a London manager when his former chief takes once more to the road.

The touring system is the one thing which has made the suburban theatre a paying possibility. The weekly visits of the touring companies relieve the suburban manager of all risk, inasmuch as his patrons are enabled to witness a West-End success almost at their own doors at popular prices. And it is just the same in the provinces. Any local tradesman can now run a theatre at a profit without the least theatrical experience. People go to the theatre one week, and do not like the play; they console themselves with the reflection that next week something better will be set before them. New productions are never heard of, *unless* the author of the play to be exploited, or the speculative stranger, takes all the risks upon his own shoulders. After all, the London successes constantly going the rounds are not nearly so numerous as provincial audiences fondly imagine. Plays which have failed in London are boomed in the country on the strength of a six nights' run at this or that West-End theatre. Occasionally, too, a vacant week has to be filled in by a play of which the resident manager knows nothing.

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He can only rely upon a good show of posters. Then, again, when a town contains two or three theatres, a company often makes a return visit after a few weeks to a house situated but a stone's-throw from the scene of its former visit. In this way country audiences have few novelties placed before them. They are invited to see the same play performed by the same company two or three times a year.

The touring system is also responsible for many society scandals and divorce proceedings which have come to light in these modern days. Actors and actresses can form *liaisons* on tour which would have caused them to be loathed by the good folk of a town, who could not fail to hear of their relations during the period of a 'season' extending over several months. Nor must we lose sight of the fact that, whereas the 'one-part actors' are now so numerous, the 'stars' of a bygone day made a circuit of the provinces with an exhaustive *répertoire*. For this reason, if for no other, the present touring system must be discounted as an artistic development. The leading lights of the dramatic profession have degenerated into parrot actors, while their supporters lack the experience which can only come from the study of many parts. In this respect, at least, our modern histrions compare most unfavourably with those of the old school. Socially superior they may be, and better paid they are, but they can never boast of that practical training which was to be acquired under the old *régime*.

Another consideration which the advocates of the travelling companies uniformly overlook is that stage-managers and prompters now find their occupation gone. A resident stage-manager (worthy the name) is nowhere to be met with in the country at large, while the prompter has entirely disappeared from the face of the theatrical globe. Such nominal stage-management as is required under the touring system consists solely in seeing the scenes hung in their proper positions as soon as the company arrives in a town, and a little supervision of the 'property man' during the first night's performance. The whole business of stage-management has, in short, been usurped by the original 'producer' of the play, both in town and country. In London particularly, the prompter is an altogether fictitious personage; many weeks' rehearsals and long runs have rendered his services superfluous. If he exists at all, he styles himself 'assistant stage-manager,' since the nominal stage-manager happens to be either the actor-manager himself or the leading man in the company.

The universality of the touring system has also practically abolished the resident scenic artist and the wardrobe-keeper. Is there one theatre out of London that possesses a 'wardrobe'? 'Special scenery' is now carried by all travelling companies, and the 'magnificent sets' that are supposed to astonish the natives 'at night,' when viewed in broad daylight, bear unmistakable evidences of hard usage on the road. Gone are the days when a provincial manager could put up any play that might be desired



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with the aid of his theatre staff and wardrobe. Those days will never come again, unless a reaction sets in for a return to the old order.

We have been tempted to speak somewhat strongly, perhaps, concerning a system which came in gradually, but which came to stay. The touring system is not a good system. There may be better all-round acting, and much better mounting of an individual play by reason of the longer time devoted to its preparation ; but of the hundreds of performers who win applause in a single part, how few could be entrusted with a new character at short notice ! The modern actor has not—cannot have—at his command a range of parts. He boasts of having played a certain part round the country a thousand times, and that is the sum of his experience. To step into a gap caused by the sudden indisposition of a performer in the legitimate drama would be utterly beyond his power.

### The Répertoire Company.

All this was felt by no less a renowned actor than Sir Henry Irving when his two sons elected to go on the stage. ‘How are they to be brought out?’ he said to a friend at the time. ‘I could only allow them to stand in the crowd at the Lyceum, to accustom them to the boards, and afterwards procure them an engagement in a touring company, where they would have to play the same insignificant part for a couple of years or more without hope of



advancement, which is not at all *my* idea of a young actor learning his business. The abolition of the stock companies has completely closed the only training schools in which an actor could formerly make headway in his profession.' Yet he found a way out of the difficulty. His younger son Lawrence was presently drafted into Mr. F. R. Benson's Shakespearian Repertoire Company.

It is in a company of this kind that the amateur or novice should endeavour to secure his first *speaking* part. Laurence Smyth's Shakespearian Company was until a year or two ago—we have latterly lost sight of it—a similar educational institution; while Miss Sarah Thorne's Theatre Royal, Margate, still flourishes as a genuine dramatic nursery. The number of well-known actors and actresses who, after graduating in 'walking parts,' really learned their business under the able superintendence of Miss Sarah Thorne is very great, but it is quite needless to name them individually. Messrs. Osmond Tearle and Edmund Tearle's Shakespearian Companies might possibly offer similar openings to the gifted aspirant; but as no actor who has roughed it himself would unhesitatingly receive a beginner without tendering *Punch's* advice, 'Don't!' the would-be actor should be thoroughly in earnest, and also expect to furnish some evidence of his fitness for the vocation. Shakespearian Repertoire Companies, or otherwise, being in these days very, very few, room cannot be found for all new-comers.

## The Stage 'Coach.'

First and foremost, then, the applicant should undergo a course of tuition with a well-known actor or actress who prepares pupils for the stage. It will cost something to do this, but the time and money will be exceedingly well spent. Elocution and deportment—the primary essentials of the actor's art—are too often neglected by would-be actors. At the same time, the aspirant cannot be too careful in the matter of selecting a qualified tutor. Self-styled 'professors of elocution' 'old actors,' 'late stage-managers,' and others who advertise for pupils, should generally be avoided. The enterprising young gentleman who at one time offered to teach 'elocution through the post' was possibly not over-successful with his startling innovation; his advertisement no longer meets the public eye. If the aspirant finds himself in a position to pay for tuition at all, he should not begrudge an extra guinea or two to command the best obtainable. A sterling actor like Mr. Herman Vezin or Mr. James Fernandez, or a retired popular actress like Mrs. John Billington, would bring out the best qualities of a gifted pupil in a remarkably short time, and afterwards introduce him or her to a professional engagement.

When we hear of a new actress or *prima donna* suddenly sprung, as it were, upon the London stage, and wondering ask ourselves whence she came, it will

be found on inquiry that she owed her introduction to an influential 'coach,' dramatic or musical, as the case may be. To be thus hoisted to the top of the professional ladder is very pleasant, but such examples are few and far between. Many of the ladies who now adorn the London stage in leading parts, though unheard of until they actually made their *début* at a special *matinée* or in a new production, were not altogether strangers to the foot-lights as fashionable amateurs, or in 'walking parts,' perhaps under a different name.

Mr. Brandon Thomas played very small parts with the Kendals for some years under the name of 'Mr. Brandon'; not until he was offered the leading part in Messrs. Herman and Wills's powerful melodrama, *The Golden Band*, at the Olympic Theatre, did he appear under his full name. Mr. John Hare studied for six months under Mr. Leigh Murray. Miss Mabel Love was coached in her early parts for the Gaiety by Miss Carlotta Leclercq. The same excellent 'coach' introduced her pupil Miss Edith Jordan to play the leading part of Hetty Sorrel in the dramatized version of *Adam Bede* at the Holborn Theatre, when that now defunct house was under the brief management of Mr. George Rignold. Mrs. Conover, actress-manageress of the old Olympic Theatre, was a pupil of Mrs. Chippendale. Miss Margaret Ayrton studied under three of the best 'coaches' of modern times—Mr. Chippendale, Mr. Horace Wigan, and Mr. Dallas Glyn. Mr. Charles Cartwright was originally a pupil of the



late William Creswick. Mr. John Ryder, of Drury Lane Theatre, and Mr. Coe, a stage-manager of old standing at the Haymarket Theatre, brought out quite a number of pupils who are now popular favourites. The late Mrs. Stirling (Lady Gregory) was another experienced 'coach,' to whom many actors and actresses owed their introduction to the profession. The Neville Dramatic School—a still existing institution—can also boast of many capable recruits who enlisted under its banner. We have already mentioned Mr. F. R. Benson's Shakespearian Company as an excellent training-ground for the dramatic tyro; therein Miss Bessie Hatton, Miss Rosina Philippi, and sundry others, gained their experience while yet 'unwept, unhonoured, and unsung,' in the Metropolis.

### The Experimental Matinée.

Miss Jessie Millward did a very bold thing to bring herself into public notice, albeit her talent, as it proved, fully warranted the step. Having had a 'walking part' under the Kendals at the St. James's Theatre, she, with the help of some amateur friends, gave an experimental *matinée* of *Love's Sacrifice* at Toole's Theatre. The success of her performance in this venture resulted in the offer of a speaking part by Mr. and Mrs. Kendal. Mrs. Bernard Beere—an amateur of note—became a pupil of Mr. Herman Vezin. Mrs. Brown-Potter—another fashionable amateur—made her first appearance on the pro-



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fessional stage in aid of a charity at the Madison Square Theatre, New York; while Mrs. Patrick Campbell, though sustaining a very small part in a provincial company organized by Mr. Herman Vezin, was saluted as 'the coming actress' by Mr. Clement Scott, when, as a matter of fact, the *Daily Telegraph* critic had travelled down the country for the express purpose of witnessing the performance of a *débutante* in the leading character. Thereupon she hazarded a matinée of *As You Like It* on her own account. Miss Sophie Scottie, discontented with 'walking parts' that never promised to develop into 'speaking parts' on the London boards, became at last audacious enough to risk a matinée at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in a play from our pen to enable her to appear in a leading character. Her 'walking parts' are now a thing of the past.\*

So much can be done when the aspirant has talent *and* money. Both are very necessary to make a short-cut to a position, but with money alone all the tuition and determination in the world can

\* The responsibility of inviting criticism in this way is not to be lightly undertaken. Many an ambitious *débutante* who makes herself the centre of attraction at an experimental matinée, or 'at night,' must feel as the great Mrs. Siddons felt when she made her *début* at Drury Lane fresh from the provinces. These are her own words: 'The awful consciousness that one is sole object of attention to that immense space—lined, as it were, with human intellect from top to bottom, and all around—may be imagined, but can never be described, and by me can never be forgotten.'

avail nothing. Talent there must be to lead to success on the boards. That truth has been forced upon many would-be actors on the occasion of a trial matinée or pretentious *première*. The ambitious aspirant who fails does indeed 'strut and fret his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more.'

As we have said above, it would be futile to seek after an engagement in a first-class *répertoire* company unless the aspirant can furnish some proofs of his (or her) ability in a speaking part. A cherished first appearance obtained under false pretences might only lead to an ignominious expulsion. Talent, of course, *will* make its way under the most trying conditions, but it is always wise to avoid the check that results from the ambition that o'erleaps itself.

### The 'Fit-up' Tour.

The best advice to be given the stage-struck hero who is unable to command the services of a qualified coach is to strive after an engagement in a 'fit-up touring company.' By a 'fit-up company' is meant one visiting public halls, corn exchanges, assembly-rooms, and the like, in towns that do not possess a regular theatre. All the appurtenances of the stage—the bare platform alone excepted—are carried. The framework of the proscenium and scenery, comprising the 'fit-up,' is naturally made to take to pieces and pack into the smallest compass. Some 'fit-ups' are very compact contrivances, and the scenes are very prettily painted; those sent

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round the smaller towns by Mr. D'Oyly Carte are quite a feast to the eye.

Yet, however well adapted a 'fit-up' may be for ordinary halls, there is often considerable cutting and contriving when the company arrives in a strange place. We have known the ceiling to be so low as to render the employment of the scenic framework utterly impracticable, in which event the usual proscenium had perforce to be dispensed with altogether, and the scenes and wings fixed in position as best they could. At times the hall is perfectly innocent of a platform, or it is so narrow that it becomes necessary for the performers to jump down on the floor—almost in sight of the audience. Under these circumstances a majestic stride 'off' is not calculated to be very impressive. In some cases, again, the narrow dimensions of the hall precludes the provision of a passage-way behind the wings, so that all entrances and exits have necessarily to be made 'up the stage'—a procedure that involves no small amount of squeezing round the sides of the 'back cloth.' Or, as like as not, gas may be unknown as an illuminant at the temporary abode of the wandering Thespians. Some ludicrous items not in the programme, resulting from these shortcomings, will be found recorded in our 'Roughing-it on the Stage.'

A 'fit-up tour,' provided the company plays a *répertoire* of pieces, affords the beginner every facility for learning his business. (We are now assuming that he has successfully overcome the distressing



inconveniences of stage-fright by a previous experience, however brief, in 'walking parts,' as a chorister, or as an amateur actor.) Hard work he will find it at the outset to memorize a part—two or three parts, mayhap—in the space of a few hours. The mere mechanical effort of studying the words, and, what is more to the purpose, retaining them, must strike him as little short of appalling. That desideratum, a book of the play for each member of the company, is in almost all cases a thing unknown. Generally there is but one copy, the manager's own, and that has to pass from hand to hand while the ladies and gentlemen transcribe their parts.\* The alarums and excursions which ensue to obtain possession of the much-bespoken copy are often amusing. Young Mr. Marmaduke Fitzmaurice (real name Jones) invariably sacrifices the only half-hour left him for his dinner or tea in hanging about the lodgings of Miss D'Alvera de Montmorency (baptismal name Anna Maria Tomkins), who has not quite finished with it. And having at last borne it off to his own domicile, he is conscious of another 'poor player' belabouring the door-knocker for the loan of it—all too brief.

\* In ordinary touring companies, actors' parts, type-written, are provided by the management.



## Memorizing a Part.

The unfledged actor may in this place be profitably informed how to memorize his part, for there is a right way and a wrong way. Amateurs who provide themselves with a printed copy of the play do not study their parts to the best advantage. Lines and speeches other than those to be actually committed to memory are distracting to the eye and to the mind; they should be run through with a pen. Better still it would be to copy the part out from beginning to end. Transcription is a great aid to the memory. The 'cues' are just as important to remember as the spoken words. It is almost superfluous to explain that the cues consist of the last word or two preceding the line or speech to be delivered. An actor does not require to know who it is that gives him his cue; the words themselves must be fixed in his mind. Let him be on the alert for them, and all will be well. He should also be careful to deliver the final words of his speeches with exactness and distinctness—one might almost say with emphasis—for the benefit of those who are listening to take them up.\* Old stagers are gener-

\* The following short extract from the part of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, as it would appear in an actor's transcription from the acting edition of the play, may be of service to the beginner. It will be seen, on comparison with a handy volume of Shakespeare's

ally very remiss in giving a young actor his proper cues, a habit which may arise either from careless study or a liking for heaping confusion upon him. If he is letter-perfect in the text, yet cannot accommodate himself to a strange phrasing of the cue he waits for, woe betide him! There is a world of trouble in store for him when, as often happens, he

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works, that no distinction is made between the several characters who furnish the cues :

‘ ——— gentle answer, Jew.

I have possessed your grace of what I purpose :  
 And by our holy Sabbath have I sworn  
 To have the due and forfeit of my bond.  
 If you deny it, let the danger light  
 Upon your charter and your city's freedom !  
 You'll ask me, why I rather choose to have  
 A weight of carrion flesh, than to receive  
 Three thousand ducats ? I'll not answer that,  
 But say, it is my humour ! Is it answer'd ?

\* \* \* \* \*

So can I give no reason, nor I will not,  
 More than a lodg'd hate, and a certain loathing  
 I bear Antonio, that I follow thus  
 A losing suit against him. Are you answer'd ?  
 ——— of thy cruelty.

I am not bound to please thee with my answer.  
 ——— do not love ?

Hates any man the thing he would not kill ?  
 ——— hate at first.

What, wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice ?  
 ——— here are six.

If every ducat in six thousand ducats  
 Were in six parts, and every part a ducat,  
 I would not draw them. I would have my bond.'

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is looked upon by his comrades as 'a confounded amateur,' and so every opportunity is seized to confound him still more. Should he have the smallest suspicion of this, his only safe plan will be, at rehearsal, to take in the drift of the speech that leads up to his cue, and consider in what way other words might possibly be substituted to convey the same meaning.

But, after all, he should endeavour, in whatever kind of company he may find himself, to make his colleagues his friends. Pride and exclusiveness are the young actor's worst enemies. While he has everything to learn in his new vocation, he can ill afford to stand aloof from those who could be of material assistance to him. Professional sociability, however, does not imply always treating and being treated to drinks at a neighbouring house of call. There is not the slightest necessity to allow himself to fall into drinking habits—a danger against which every young actor should be carefully guarded. Should he chance to be a total abstainer, so much the better. His principles will be respected so long as he acts manfully up to them and betrays no bigotry. The assumption that the strictly temperate actor is despised by his *confrères* is altogether unfounded.

To return to his part. After a general 'read through' of the whole transcription, the novice should confine himself to studying one page at a time. Better far to have a few scenes thoroughly by heart than a smattering acquaintance with three



or five acts. Loud declamation of his speeches in private will not be of the smallest help to him; rather the contrary, for until he has the words firmly fixed in his mind, all thought of *acting* his part is out of the question. This is where the stage-struck hero and the untaught amateur make their great mistake; they try to act their part before they know their lines. Where a fresh part has to be studied every day, the beginner has enough to do to cram the text into his poor brain, without troubling himself about the effects he would produce. This being so, acting may well be left to take care of itself. If he has not utterly mistaken his vocation, acting will come to him in good time. Let him strive at first to 'speak the speech,' take up and give his cues, and simply walk through his part. The 'stage duffer' is not generally the one who cannot act, but he who creates confusion among his fellows by an imperfect acquaintance with his part. Numerous examples might be here cited of beginners who afterwards developed into good actors, whose alleged 'incompetence' in their early days arose entirely from hopeless 'sticking' in the words. The finest conception of a part is absolutely worthless while the text is imperfectly committed to memory.



## Stage Directions.

It goes without saying that the printed stage-directions must be copied into an actor's part; much also remains to be pencilled in from hints and suggestions received at rehearsal. The dramatic tyro needs to have all his wits about him to profit by the stage-manager's instructions. Failure to note and remember the precise spot where he should stand, place a chair, fall, come on and go off, or his cue to cross over ('cross,' according to the language of the stage), creates more confusion 'at night' than is good for the play or pleasant for the players.

To an amateur actor, explanation of the printed initials to be transcribed from the play-book—I.E.R. (first entrance right), L.U.E. (left upper entrance), D.F. (door in flat), P.W. (practicable window), D.R.C. (door right centre), P.S. (prompt side; otherwise, the left-hand side of the stage when facing the audience), O.P. (opposite the 'prompt' or prompter's side), etc.—will be superfluous; but the novice may not be so well informed. Some knowledge of technical terms will also be very useful, since a woeful display of ignorance in this respect oft-times makes the judicious grieve. A solitary instance from our experience will serve to make our meaning clear. Thus, in a provincial performance of that old, old melodrama *Forsaken*, a novice actor was told to 'cross the stage with a pair of braces'—short iron

rods used for bracing up pieces of scenery. Judge of the general consternation when that guileless youth strutted across the boards in the Saw-mill Scene with a pair of trouser braces!

### Professional Slang.

This brings us to the subject of professional slang, an acquaintance with which should form part of the young actor's stock-in-trade, if he wishes to stand well with his fellows.

A company is called a 'crowd,' a play a 'piece,' a performance a 'show,' a *matinée* a 'morning show,' an engagement a 'shop,' the act-drop or green curtain 'the rag,' and payment of the salary list 'treasury.' When the time comes round for 'treasury,' and actors cluster round the manager's door waiting to be paid, the common question is, 'Is the Ghost walking?' Very often that shadowy personage scents the morning air, and vanishes without manifesting himself to the expectant mortals who are dependent upon his good offices for their forthcoming Sunday's dinner. 'The Ghost forgot to walk!' is tantamount to saying the salaries were never paid. Not one actor out of a thousand has the remotest idea of the origin of this expression. It arose in this way: A certain eighteenth-century manager of the 'bogus' type had in his company a singularly self-willed actor whose strongest part was

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the Ghost in *Hamlet*. This gentleman never submitted to being put off with excuses when the Saturday morning's 'treasury' was not open for all concerned; he resolutely declined to walk 'at night.' The consequence was if Mr. Bogus did not make it convenient to satisfy his company's demands, he had either to change the play or send on an inferior actor to play the part. It is said that the ladies and gentlemen of the company usually assembled in an adjacent public-house at 'treasury' time until word was brought to them that the Ghost *would* walk. Such unanimity among actors rarely comes to light in these days.\*

A company left in the lurch by an absconding manager, or prematurely disbanded on account of bad business, experiences what is called 'a dry-up.' The advent of 'a dry-up member,' so styled because he has repeatedly held engagements under insolvent managers, is always regarded as an ill omen for the company he has just joined; and, strange to say, it is not long before their worst fears come to be realized. To refer to 'the manager' would be to

\* Henry Mossop, the tragedian, was a bad paymaster, but one night he unexpectedly found his match. When, as King Lear, he lay in the arms of Kent, the actor playing that character whispered to him, 'If you don't give me your word of honour that you'll pay me my arrears of salary to-night, I'll let you drop.' 'Don't talk to me now,' growled Mossop; 'get on with the play!' 'Promise, or I'll suit the action to the word—I will, I will!' was the rejoinder. Mossop gave his promise and religiously kept it.



betray a refinement unknown in the lower ranks of the theatrical profession ; his designation is 'the guv'nor' or 'the boss.' An out-and-out bogus manager goes by the name of a 'Sheiser,' whatever that may mean. Vacancies in a company are filled up by 'people,' while 'useful people' are those who can be relied upon to play anything and everything at short notice. The term 'pantomime' is abbreviated into 'panto'; the transformation scene becomes 'trans,' a professional 'a pro'; 'biz' stands for business, 'ben' for benefit, 'circs' for circumstances, 'exes' for expenses, and 'com' for the agent's commission. Money is 'oof,' and, less frequently, 'kudos.' Lodgings are 'diggings'; to have a drink is to 'liquor up,' or 'have a smile,' the latter a decided Americanism ; a public-house is either a 'hostelry' or a 'pub.'

A stage-manager's technical description of scenery is 'stuff.'

### Actors' 'Properties.'

'Properties'—the general term for stage furniture and all other accessories apart from scenery—is of course short for 'the property of the theatre'; just as an actor's personal wardrobe for the stage is expressed in the plural, but laconically 'props.' 'Hand props,' or properties, consist of such articles as a newspaper, letter, cigarette, pistol, etc. ; these, with the more cumbrous furniture, armour, weapons,



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etc., are placed under the charge of the 'property man.'

The dressing of a modern play forms no small item in an actor's expenditure, for he is expected to find everything, from his wigs down to his shoes. Costume plays are now, in the West-End and in the best touring companies, completely 'dressed' by the management; but in all inferior organizations the time-honoured rule still holds good, viz., that actors must provide their own tights, shoes, boot-tops, wigs, crêpe hair, frills, 'ballet shirts,' gloves or gauntlets, hats, feathers, swords and sword-belts, and various other oddments too numerous to particularize. The originator of this rule was no less a personage than Sir Charles D'Avenant, since it formed one of the many 'items' inserted in his articles of agreement with his company of players on the opening by royal license of the Salisbury Court Theatre in 1660. It was as follows: 'The management shall not provide the actors with hats, feathers, gloves, ribbons, swords, belts, bands, shoes, and stockings.' When the stock companies were universally in vogue, each theatre in town and country had its own wardrobe, comprising 'shirts,' 'shapes,' 'square-cuts,' togas, gowns, and 'tuck-ups'; nowadays everything is ordered new for a West-End production, and after the run of the piece stored away or sold off by auction to the highest bidder.

When 'writing-in' for an engagement, the inclusion of the all-important sentence, 'Good wardrobe on and off the stage,' has great weight with

a manager, particularly with the manager of a *répertoire* touring company. A bad actor is often tolerated in an inferior company if he brings with him a goodly assortment of serviceable properties, for to dress a part well reflects credit on the management. Moreover, an amateur or a novice, supplied with 'good props,' can always make friends or enemies in a small company, according as he is willing to place his hamper at the service of his less fortunate comrades who have, perhaps, been obliged to part with their own 'props' by piecemeal at the sign of the Three Brass Balls. If he refuses point-blank, they will play him tricks, 'gag' him out of all recollection of his lines, wilfully give him wrong cues, and in a hundred different ways make his professional life a burden to him. It would be bad policy for the new-comer to make himself disliked at the very outset of his career. The loan of a trifling article or two would be amply repaid by the help which every old stager could render him, more especially in the matter of 'making up' his face, which is an art in itself, while the mysteries of 'faking' a costume can only be learned by keeping one's eyes open in a strolling actor's dressing-room. It is really wonderful to note the effects that may be produced by the ingenious out of few materials.

We have not yet quite done with professional slang. The novice who blunders on to the stage at the wrong moment bears the name of a 'fluffer.' An actor uncertain of his lines confesses to being 'shaky,' and takes every opportunity of conning his

part in the wings while waiting to go on. This is called 'winging it.' To cut another actor out of his lines, or spoil his scene for him, from whatever cause arising, is to 'queer' him, or 'queer his biz.' Actors never speak of gaining applause. They say, 'I couldn't get a hand.' Trying a new play in some out-of-the-way country place is described in theatrical parlance as 'trying it on the dog.' The same expression obtains when a new production, intended for the Metropolis, is exploited at a provincial theatre. A play utterly condemned on production proves a 'frost'; a bad play is laconically dubbed 'rot.' Mr. Chippendale is said to have scribbled this word on the back of poor Tom Robertson's *Society*—another proof that the judgment of experienced actors and managers is by no means infallible.

An actor's part consists of so many 'lengths,' each consisting of forty lines. A part in which he expects to score heavily is said to suit him 'down to the ground.' A male part played by an actress is called a 'breeches part.' An 'oyster part' contains only one speech, though it may be a long one; like an oyster, the actor opens his mouth but once. A 'fat part' is one which all actors love, because there is plenty of it. Considered in its literal sense, a fat part would assuredly be that of Sir John Falstaff. Mr. Arthur Bouchier relates how, when playing this character in the provinces one night, he wore, instead of the usual wicker arrangement, a fearfully and wonderfully made tunic inflated with air. While



standing at the wing waiting to go on the stage, one of his companions deftly punctured the blown-out contrivance in several places with a bodkin, the result of which was that the burly knight became visibly thinner as the play proceeded. A ‘clap-trap speech’ abounds in virtuous sentiments—the dramatist’s traditional trap for applause from pit and gallery.

‘Gags’ and ‘Wheezes.’

The true meaning of the words ‘gag’ and ‘gagging’ is in these days entirely misunderstood. Instead of implying interpolated speeches at the actor’s own sweet will, for the greater success of his part, they originally meant words purposely employed in order to disconcert another performer. Hence, by propounding questions which the latter was unable to answer, or ignoring his own proper cues, the ‘gagger’ metaphorically put a gag over the other’s mouth, or shut him up. ‘The Actor Who Couldn’t Gag’ is the title of one of our recent contributions to the theatrical journals.

‘Gagging’ is now the recognised privilege of the low comedian. In pantomime and burlesque he is allowed to do pretty nearly what he likes. It has its limitations, however. In the ‘legitimate’ it would be entirely out of place—mark here the wisdom of Hamlet’s Advice to the Players—while in melodrama it becomes a matter of arrangement with the



stage-manager. Gagging has never been allowed in any of the Savoy operas. On the other hand, Mr. Arthur Williams made his first great hit by the successful gags he introduced into the small part of Lurcher in *Dorothy*. Mr. Arthur Roberts is an accomplished 'gagger.' Without his extempore gags, wheezes, and 'business' the parts he plays would go for nothing.

A 'wheeze' differs from a 'gag' in that it is the same phrase repeated *ad nauseam* in the course of the play by an individual actor. 'Another injustice to Oireland!' exclaims the comic Irishman in the Drury Lane melodrama *Youth* each time he makes an exit. 'There's more trouble coming!' says the pantomime comedian the instant he appears on the scene. Original wheezes are largely in request for pantomime purposes. 'Got any new wheezes to give away?' actors will be heard asking one another as soon as they have settled their Christmas engagements.

### Stage 'Business.'

'Business' is the general term for everything *done* on the stage, in contradiction to what is *spoken*. There are three kinds of business—the *bus* set down in the play-book, that suggested by the author or stage-manager at rehearsal, and that invented by the actor himself. Once a piece of stage-business has been found to go well with the audience, it is retained. In the legitimate drama, such business has

been handed down from generation to generation as part and parcel of an accepted reading. To break away from theatrical tradition is an offence which actors of the old school did not readily condone. It is in this that true artistic genius asserts itself. Edmund Kean encountered much opposition on his first appearance at Drury Lane Theatre in the character of Shylock, for wearing a black wig instead of the traditional red one. This was not really 'business,' in the ordinary acceptance of the word. All the same, it evidenced a nice discrimination of the fitness of things, which the general run of actors habitually ignore. Sir Henry Irving is a master of dramatic detail. The amount of thought he bestows upon the merest trifles in connection with the parts he has made his own has helped to make him what he is; the expedition with which he rolled a cigarette in the *Corsican Brothers* must have cost him weeks of practice. 'By strict attention to business'—as the tradesmen say on their circulars—a part, which in the hands of a careless performer would be nothing at all, can be invested with an importance altogether undreamt of by manager and by critic. 'Creating a part' is nothing less than developing its possibilities, but it is not every actor who is sufficiently an *artiste* to discover the hidden possibilities in a small part.

'Look at that little man! He is trying to make a part out of nothing!' exclaimed an actor, pointing to Edmund Kean years before he took the town by storm. He laboured at the veriest trifles. John

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Philip Kemble was never done with improving his Hamlet; in the course of his theatrical career he wrote out the part no less than forty times. Macready was wont to shut himself up in the theatre every Sunday after morning service, we are told by Barton Baker, 'and pace the stage in every direction, to give himself ease, to become familiar with the deportment, with exits and entrances, and with every variety of gestures and attitudes. His characters were all acted over and over again, and his speeches recited, till, tired out, he was glad to breathe the fresh air again.' This went on for years, even after he achieved fame. 'The longest life,' says Colley Cibber, 'is too short for the almost endless study of the actor.'

Cibber was himself a notable example of what can be accomplished by enthusiasm and perseverance, despite physical shortcomings. Of such stuff great actors are made. Those who never attempt to act at rehearsal, saying, 'It'll be all right at night,' cannot expect to make headway in their adopted profession; they are utterly devoid of the enthusiasm which is in the end crowned with success.

The elder Kean always recited in front of a mirror. Mr. Beerbohm Tree habitually submits his carefully-thought-out business to the critical judgment of his wife and fellow *artiste* in private. And it is equally true that every actor worthy the name devotes the same minute attention to the smallest part as should pertain to the greatest. Edward Askew Sotherton found little enough to work upon



in the character of Lord Dundreary as it originally stood, but his genius enabled him to develop it into one of the first importance. His well-known stammer came to him as an inspiration—it has often been imitated since his day—and his aristocratic drawl had not previously been introduced on the stage. Mr. John S. Clarke's Major Wellington de Boots was a part created out of very poor materials in the play originally designated *Everybody's Friend*; we all know how the actor made it stand out as a genuine bit of character-acting.

'Many actors,' writes Mrs. Kendal, 'have established reputations by playing small parts only, and by playing them so well that, being known for a particular style of acting, they are engaged solely for the kind of parts that suits their peculiar personalities. In this way they sometimes establish a good reputation, and are really more valuable than some persons in greater positions.'

So arise the actors who make a 'line of business' for themselves, and wisely keep to it. The only unfortunate thing is that when, in the heyday of their success, they have plays specially written for them, those plays rarely hold the stage. David James never met with another part equal to Perkyn Middlewick; the butcher in *The Excursion Train*, and the Punch-and-Judy man in *Punch*, lacked the human nature of his immortal butterman. Miss Louie Freer made a decided hit as the London lodging-house slavey in *Oh Susannah!* Alas! its successor *Julia*, for playing the name-part in which



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she was to receive £100 a week, failed to draw the public. At the same time, there are scores of old comedies, affording plentiful scope for acting of the highest order, that might profitably be drawn upon by actors and actresses who have gained the confidence of managers.

The stereotyped 'lines of business,' for which *artistes* were formerly engaged by the year, may now be said to be well-nigh extinct. Only in melodrama do we meet with the leading man and leading lady (hero and heroine), juvenile lady and gentleman, first old man or heavy father, heavy lady, heavy gentleman or villain, first old woman, low comedian, character actor, light comedian, chambermaid or singing soubrette, and these are not nearly so well defined as they were of old. Any one of them, in fact, might be more correctly described as a 'character part,' natural or eccentric, according to the exigencies of the play. 'Utilities' and 'responsibles' are known by these names no longer; the new school of actors will have nothing to do with terms so common.

### 'Creating' a Part.

After all, the smallest part is on an artistic level with the greatest, when the histrion exercises the intellectuality to 'hold the mirror up to Nature.' The day when an actor—we are not now speaking of the novice—could simply *look* a part and leisurely

walk through it has gone by. A genuine touch of nature there must be in every acted part, however farcical or eccentric it may be. For no one ever *invented* character; that is wholly beyond the power of actor, novelist, or playwright; it must be sought for among all sorts and conditions of men in the world around, as Dickens sought for it in the highways and byways of London. A distinctive trait may be copied from one human document, a marked peculiarity from a second and a third, the whole being ingeniously blended. Character is always human nature. So that, properly speaking, parts are not *created*; they can only be reproduced from life, photographed, touched up, redrawn, as one might say. A character, as it leaves the hands of a playwright, differs from that of a novelist, inasmuch as it is more or less sketchy, and purposely so; the pages of descriptive detail relative to character delineation must give place to a living reality in the person of the actor from his observations of men and manners. The true mission of Art is to simulate Nature.

‘It is the easiest thing in the world to write a play,’ said Robert Southey to his maiden aunt one day in his twelfth year. ‘Is it, indeed?’ exclaimed that lady in surprise. ‘Yes,’ was the answer; ‘because you have only to study what you would say if you were in the place of the characters, and make them say it.’ Theoretically this was a most admirable dictum, but the young poet’s inexperience did not take into account the artistic faculty which

enables the playwright to put himself in the place of so many different characters, and make capital out of their various moods and idiosyncrasies. With the actor the difficulty is somewhat simplified. He has but *one* character to impersonate, and that he will accomplish successfully in proportion as he studies, firstly, its relation to the other characters of the play; secondly, its relation to the action of the play; and thirdly, its relation to that particular species of humanity moving in the world at large of which his character part, as supplied to him by the author, is merely a skeleton idea.

John Emery, the most famous countryman the stage has ever seen, did not content himself with copying the drivelling, doddering, half-idiotic rustic clad in smock-frock, gaiters, and hob-nailed boots, which had satisfied theatrical audiences for generations, because *that* was a type easily recognised and understood. He mixed freely with the people he wished to portray, ate, drank, and chatted with them in country taverns; in short, he went direct to Nature for his raw material. Mr. Henry Neville is the finest living exponent of the Lancashire lad. This was by no means a bit of character-acting evolved in the study, but from the type itself, while the actor was earning, though not always receiving, his ridiculously small salary at the Theatres Royal and Rural in Bob Brierly's own country. Still less did Miss Clara Jecks and Miss Louie Freer elaborate their faithful impersonations of the London lodging-house slavey, and the ignorant domestic of



a superior class, out of their inner consciousness; they studied their character from the life in its native atmosphere. As we know, Mr. E. S. Willard, before producing *The Middleman* at the Shaftesbury Theatre, spent some time in search of local colour in the pottery districts of Stoke and Worcester. Miss Dorothy Dene made her great hit in the part of Pauline in *Called Back*, but neither playgoers nor critics were aware that she had previously studied madness where it could best be studied in its most terrible aspect, namely, among Bedlamites, or, in other words, at the Bethlehem Hospital. Mr. Lionel Rignold is particularly happy in his impersonations of cabmen, sporting characters, longshoremen, Jack Tars, and kindred types of humanity, and this for the reason that it has always been his custom to scrape an acquaintance with the very folk who stand him in good service as object-lessons for stage purposes.

### Mistaken ‘Lines of Business.’

Most people who are not *artistes* by nature are prone—judging from the many indifferent exhibitions they witness in these days—to place low comedy on a level with buffoonery. But this is quite a mistake. The true low comedian is as much an *artiste* as the exponent of the higher comedy, which ranks with tragedy. Tragedy deals with the passions, comedy with habits and manners. The



'light comedian' was a line of business unknown in the palmy days of the drama; an actor who, after discovering his real powers, eschewed tragic parts, was simply a 'comedian.' Comedy has a much wider range than tragedy. Cibber's answer, on being told that a certain part was not in his way: 'I think anything naturally written ought to be in everybody's way that pretends to be an actor,' was artistic in theory, but it could not be applied in practice. A harsh, unmusical voice or a stunted figure would not show a tragedian in a favourable light; there are physical as well as mental qualifications to be considered in playing a diversity of parts. Still, there are exceptions. Edmund Kean was a very short man, much too diminutive to look the part of Othello; but as soon as he commenced to speak his stature was forgotten, and he appeared a giant. Kean was essentially a tragedian, and one of the greatest. An actor like David Garrick or Sir Henry Irving excels in both comedy and tragedy, but such geniuses are rare. Mrs. Siddons failed utterly in comedy; not until she returned to the provinces after her initial engagement at Drury Lane did she discover her real gifts. On the other hand, some of the most successful comedians have firmly and persistently believed themselves cut out for tragedy. Colley Cibber, against all better counsel, *would* appear as Wolsey, Richard the Third, and Iago; in the last-named character he was once hissed off the stage, while as Richard he turned the performance into ridicule. Quin made his audience laugh

outright when he essayed the part of the crook-backed monarch. Weston was anything but successful in the same character; the next night he delighted everyone as Scrubb in *The Beau's Stratagem*. One can imagine what a burlesque Samuel Foote and Kitty Clive made of Shylock and Portia when the former put up *The Merchant of Venice* for his benefit. Munden, the champion face-maker of the stage, felt convinced he would score in tragedy, but he was quickly undeceived. Liston, too, until John Kemble, as stage-manager, discovered his comic powers, courted dire failure in his tragic impersonations. Nevertheless, his abiding belief in his tragic powers presently led him to set the house in a roar not intended when he figured in *Romeo*. Such mistakes have been, and are fortunately, however, confined to actors at the top of the profession; the small actor in a stock company, or what is its modern substitute, a touring *répertoire* company, is not likely to be afforded an opportunity of thus making a laughing-stock of himself. Stage-managers have more discernment than the outside public give them credit for.

## The Novice-Actor in the Study.

If, in the foregoing dissertation on stage 'business' and kindred matters, we have strayed away from the young actor labouring to memorize his first speaking part, we have not done so unwittingly. We cannot attempt to teach a person how to become an actor if he has not the vocation for it. How to get on the stage is a different matter, and being there, his abilities must determine whether or not he retains his footing. The would-be artist may be taught how to mix his colours, and produce certain effects with them, but that alone will never make him an artist. The literary tyro may be instructed in the rudiments of his craft, a certain amount of *technique* and suitable channels for the disposal of *acceptable* work may be indicated, but authorship without the true literary faculty must ever be love's labour lost.

It is the same with acting. In the absence of a qualified tutor—by preference an actor or stage-manager of established reputation—the beginner will have to make a hard study of everything appertaining to elocution and deportment. Such things are not to be learned exclusively from books, though many serviceable hints might be given to the student in these pages did space permit. We can but direct him to the 'Hints to Reciters' forming our introduction to 'The Century Reciter'; it would only be going over the same ground needlessly to re-



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peat them here. Let us rather deal with the experiences which are likely to befall the stage beginner in a small stock or *répertoire* touring company.

Pitiable indeed will be his state until he has accustomed himself in a measure to the fatiguing process of committing the text of his part to memory in the shortest possible space of time. Having made his transcription from the play-book for the next day's rehearsal, his work will be by no means at an end when he has survived the anxieties of his first night's performance. Arrived at his lodgings he will be ready to enjoy his supper, and, if he has wisely provided himself with a pound of candles, to prepare for the vigil which his adopted profession compels him to keep. Hot coffee to keep him awake, and damp towels to cool his brain, may be recommended. Perhaps about three o'clock in the morning he will consider himself letter-perfect in the text. Nevertheless, he must not be too certain of this; a further spell before rising will be highly desirable. Nor can he dismiss the part from his mind while he is discussing a well-earned breakfast. The meal over, it will be time for him to make his way to rehearsal. The 'call' is invariably 'ten o'clock for half-past,' half an hour's grace being allowed for the variation in clocks.



## At Rehearsal.

Differing from a theatre proper, where the stage by day is nothing more than a square platform (such scenes as are not mounted on rollers being 'struck' and leaned, like the 'wings,' flat against the back and side walls), there will in a public hall temporarily converted into a theatre be plentiful indications of the previous night's performance. The 'back cloth' remains as it appeared when the curtain was rung down, the 'wings' are still in their places, while the 'entrances' and passages behind, as well as the 'boards' themselves, are encumbered with 'properties,' furniture, costumes, and stray pieces of scenery. In the centre of the stage, down by the footlights, stands the 'prompt-table,' and on it, beside the play-book, there *should* be a pronouncing dictionary. At the 'prompt-table' sits the stage-manager with his back to the auditorium. Of course it will be all very different 'at night,' when the male members of the company, costumed and made up for their parts, are expected to lend a hand at the scene-shifting and property-carrying.

All which is very useful to the young actor, who might otherwise mistake an unintentional gap in the scenery of a 'boxed-in' drawing-room for an 'entrance,' or the significance of a 'set piece.' Where so much is left to the imagination at re-

hearsal (for the scenes are never set in the day-time, any more than the actors rehearse in their costumes), such mistakes are of very frequent occurrence. Nothing is easier, under the excitement of the moment, than for the young actor to walk on the stage through a seemingly solid wall, or from the chimney-corner of an old-fashioned fireplace instead of through the door. Inattention to the disposition of the various portions of a 'set scene' is generally fraught with some ludicrous incident not in the programme.

Well do we recollect assuming an easy attitude against a projecting piece of scenery at the back of the stage at a large London theatre one night—in accordance with the business of the play—while an interesting colloquy was going forward between two of our comrades down by the footlights. Presently strange pantomimic signs on the part of a stage-carpenter standing in the wings made us aware that something was evidently amiss. We glanced down our person, thinking perhaps our costume was not in apple-pie order. Still the mysterious pantomime continued, until at length the carpenter made his way round to the 'entrance,' situated within a few yards of our elbow. 'What's the matter?' we inquired in a stage-aside. 'You're leaning against a waterfall!' was the startling reply. Truth to tell, what had appeared to us a rock was the 'terrific cataract' as beholden by the audience. It is therefore highly necessary for a young actor to take careful stock of a scene before making his entrance.

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The advantage of assisting in the capacity of a scene-shifter and 'property man' in connection with a theatrical 'fit-up' will thus be fully apparent.

To return to the rehearsal. The tedious 'run-through' ended, there will be the usual bespeak of the play-book for the next night's performance, and a hunt for the same at the stated hour. The transcription of his new part and a final study of the one in hand will occupy him till the time comes round to sally forth to his evening's toil. Such is the daily routine of the beginner in a 'fit-up' or small stock company, and such has been the experience of every actor who now can claim to know his business thoroughly. It is killing work; the wonder is that any survive at all. Verily, it needs a strong constitution to enable the devotee to pull through his long novitiate, particularly when to downright wear and tear of body and mind are added pecuniary anxieties arising from the dishonesty of the typical bogus manager. Still, while we are young and sanguine, we can bear much of that which in middle age would kill outright, for which reason the novice can scarcely enter the dramatic profession too young. He soon becomes accustomed to the toil of his new vocation; after a few weeks the study of a part at short notice will present no difficulties, and by that time the company will have exhausted its entire *répertoire*. Then is his opportunity to *act* his part, whereas before he could only battle with the words. Playing the same round of parts in different towns will enable him to continually improve himself; new



bits of business will suggest themselves, and acting will become a delight, hard work though it must always be. This is, of course, assuming that he remains in the company long enough to 'be through'—to make use of an Americanism—with the daily study of new parts; that the company itself is not disbanded by the manager's order, or stranded in some out-of-the-way place by the irresponsible Mr. Bogus. Unhappy the poor actor who finds himself thrown out of his employment from any one of these causes; he will have all his weary round of study over again when a new engagement is met with.

### Customs of the Theatre.

Some details of the time-honoured customs governing financial matters in the dramatic profession may be usefully set down in this place. Rehearsals are not paid for, though an actor may have to put in an attendance at a London theatre, or travel down to a provincial town, many days prior to the production of a new play. Even when the play is enjoying a successful run, the stage-manager may post up a 'call' for all concerned, with the object of improving certain scenes or rehearsing one of the parts for which a new performer has been specially engaged. In the case of a musical play the orchestral conductor often calls the company together in broad daylight for the introduction of a new song or concerted piece, while the 'second edition' of a panto-



only as a last resource. The policy of the bogus manager has ever been to keep his company together as long as it is possible to put them off with odd florins and half-crowns on account.

Looking back through the long vista of years separating the time present from our early theatrical experiences, we are astounded at the audacity of the various bogus managers we have known. There was one who, though his company toiled for him early and late, and patiently starved, denied himself none of the luxuries of life. Sad indeed it must have appeared to an outsider understanding the position, to see him waylaid in the street of an afternoon by first one, then another 'poor player,' intent upon extracting a few shillings from his particularly tight purse under a threat of refusing 'to go on at night.' And all the time Mr. Bogus would be laden with good things purchased at the fruiterer's, the poulterer's, and the Italian warehouseman's store for his own and his fat wife's table. Another adventurer of the same class looked into all the dressing-rooms late on Saturday night flourishing a £10 note, for which he required change to enable him to pay salaries. As no one was possessed of so much wealth, and the neighbouring publicans had just put up their shutters, he reluctantly deferred a settlement of accounts until Monday morning. But when the Monday morning came round, he failed to put in an appearance, and at night the discovery that he had lost heavily on the week's business made it impossible for him to pay out anything like a

stipulated salary all round. This gentleman was, however, much too wise to adopt the same *ruse* on the Saturday following, yet his ingenuity proved equal to every call upon his exchequer.

There have been London theatres run on the 'order system,' whose managers have profited largely and for a certain term from the lack of unanimity among the actors whom they systematically fleeced. For all that, the manager has never been found who could boast of meting out the like injustice to his working staff and instrumentalists. These, by their combined action when the occasion arises, are on a totally different footing to the poor players; if they are not paid on demand, they strike.\* In one of our luckless engagements, at the Royal Clarence Theatre, Dover, the all-too-independent pianist insisted on having his five shillings paid to him every night before he would consent to play the overture. On one occasion, that sum not having been taken at the doors, the manager was compelled to make up the

\* Of Crawford, the husband of the celebrated Mrs. Barry, the following story is told: In the course of a starring engagement at Dublin, he had to appear before the curtain one night, dressed for the part of Hamlet, to explain that the orchestra had struck for their salaries. 'Divil burn it, Billy Crawford!' a galleryite bawled out. 'Don't I know you play the fiddle like an angel! Tip us a tune yoursilf, darlin', and that shall contint us.' On this invitation, Hamlet procured a violin, and treated the audience to 'Paddy O'Rafferty,' but, soon warming up to his work, he broke out into a jig. This little performance ended, he retired to prepare for the tragedy.

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deficit from outside sources. And when, on the Monday night following, the happy instrumentalist was respectfully invited to throw in his lot with the infinitely less happy ladies and gentlemen who had agreed to form a commonwealth, he refused point-blank. So every night we plodded through our work for that piano-pounder's special behoof.

### The Commonwealth System.

The commonwealth system is a very old theatrical institution. It has survived all the changes of time ever since acting became a distinct profession, for, as we know, the earliest *secular* actors—there were no actresses before the Restoration, female parts being played by young men—were gentlemen attached to the royal household, or performing under the patronage of the nobility. 'Their Majesty's Servants' were entitled to wear the royal livery of scarlet and gold. When the actors finally discarded the royal or noblemen's livery, it was relegated to the attendants of the patent theatres, as may still be seen at Drury Lane and Covent Garden when the stage-attendants come before the curtain to extend the stage carpet down to the orchestra, in the garb of footmen. All the less-favoured actors—the 'rogues and vagabonds' by Act of Parliament—were essentially strollers, at all times dependent on the humour of the Lord of the Manor for permission to perform, whether in a barn, the largest room of an inn, or under cover of a



booth. The strolling company was invariably composed of a single family, with a few accessions—never more than half a dozen—of outside players, who were glad to tender their services on sharing terms—the commonwealth system, as it is called. This arrangement, however, was always a standing grievance with the hired players, for the lion's share of the receipts naturally found its way into the pockets of the manager and his family. Only in the circuits, when in process of time regular theatres sprang into existence, was anything like a stated salary established for a particular 'line of business.' Even then, when audiences were scanty, recourse was generally had to the commonwealth.

It is the same among the strollers acting in booths, in small stock companies, and in luckless 'fit-up' organizations to-day. Directly the ghost declines to walk, a meeting is held, and the proposition is carried to 'stick to the ship'—for a time, at least—on the commonwealth system. Let us see how this works out. The manager takes one share *as* manager, two as proprietor, one as actor, one for the use of his scenes and properties, and one for wear and tear—depreciation, in commercial parlance. Thus, with the claims of his wife and children, he captures, perhaps, twelve shares out of the regulation twenty; so that when the necessary deductions for rent, gas, and orchestra have been made, there remains little enough for his outside supporters.



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The commonwealth system is a very old theatrical institution. It has survived all the changes of time ever since acting became a distinct profession, for, as we know, the earliest *secular* actors—there were no actresses before the Restoration, female parts being played by young men—were gentlemen attached to the royal household, or performing under the patronage of the nobility. 'Their Majesty's Servants' were entitled to wear the royal livery of scarlet and gold. When the actors finally discarded the royal or noblemen's livery, it was relegated to the attendants of the patent theatres, as may still be seen at Drury Lane and Covent Garden when the stage-attendants come before the curtain to extend the stage carpet down to the orchestra, in the garb of footmen. All the less-favoured actors—the 'rogues and vagabonds' by Act of Parliament—were essentially strollers, at all times dependent on the humour of the Lord of the Manor for permission to perform, whether in a barn, the largest room of an inn, or under cover of a

booth. The strolling company was invariably composed of a single family, with a few accessions—never more than half a dozen—of outside players, who were glad to tender their services on sharing terms—the commonwealth system, as it is called. This arrangement, however, was always a standing grievance with the hired players, for the lion's share of the receipts naturally found its way into the pockets of the manager and his family. Only in the circuits, when in process of time regular theatres sprang into existence, was anything like a stated salary established for a particular 'line of business.' Even then, when audiences were scanty, recourse was generally had to the commonwealth.

It is the same among the strollers acting in booths, in small stock companies, and in luckless 'fit-up' organizations to-day. Directly the ghost declines to walk, a meeting is held, and the proposition is carried to 'stick to the ship'—for a time, at least—on the commonwealth system. Let us see how this works out. The manager takes one share *as* manager, two as proprietor, one as actor, one for the use of his scenes and properties, and one for wear and tear—depreciation, in commercial parlance. Thus, with the claims of his wife and children, he captures, perhaps, twelve shares out of the regulation twenty; so that when the necessary deductions for rent, gas, and orchestra have been made, there remains little enough for his outside supporters.

### The Seamy Side of the Profession.

Experiences like these—hard work and poor pay—fall plentifully to the lot of old and young actors in adverse times. They were not altogether unknown in London before the touring system placed the minor houses on a provincial basis. All which points the moral that the stage-struck youths and maidens of our generation should not rashly tempt Dame Fortune with histrionic aspirations, *unless* they can rely upon remittances from their friends to back up their own insignificant earnings. The temptations to which poor actresses are exposed result mainly from the difficulties they encounter in satisfying the demands of irate landladies. Bogus managers and others of their kind who ‘take out a company’ (*take in* would express it better), without any capital whatsoever, have hearts of stone: they thrive, while their dependents toil and starve.\*

To rough it in the provinces for a time does the enthusiastic young actor no harm, but we would draw the line at the sterner sex. We could, in fact, wax eloquent over the sad experiences of frail young women who fell at last a prey to the tempter—often the stony-hearted manager himself—from sheer force

\* ‘How little do those before the scenes know of what passes behind! How little can they judge from the countenances of actors of what is passing in their hearts!’—*Washington Irving*.



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of circumstances, after they had endured all the miseries of an aching heart and an impoverished purse. In our own poor way, during the period partly covered by 'Roughing-it on the Stage,' we did what lay in our power to stave off the inevitable catastrophe; but famine is hard to bear when the victim belongs to the weaker sex. Let the Prims and the Prudes who direct the finger of scorn at 'actresses' draw a charitable distinction between those whose desecration of the bodily temple arises from pride and self-aggrandisement, and those who unsuccessfully battle with the demon Want!

Would to Heaven there were more managers like Quin!—the illustration will serve for the former case—who thus addressed George Anne Bellamy,\* the star actress of his company: 'My dear, you are vastly followed, I hear. Do not let the love of finery or any other inducement prevail on you to commit an indiscretion. Men in general are rascals; if you want anything which it is in my power to do or that money can purchase, come to me and say: "James Quin, give me such a thing," and my purse shall be at your service.'

Sad enough it is to reflect that when poverty assails poor woman, men mostly lack the compassion which amongst Christians should be exercised toward the lonely and the unfortunate. It makes the heart bleed for the plight of the poor actress thrown upon the world with all its temptations, and without a

\* Her first Christian name was really Georgette.



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friend she can call her own. Better far to remain content with the 'walking part' in a London theatre for years, until she can be assured from reliable sources that the touring manager who offers her an engagement is commercially stable. Without such an assurance she flies to sorrows she knows not of.

To the young actor, happily fortified with private means or sympathetic friends, a word of advice may be given. Let him be mindful from the very earliest contact with his professional associates not to make a parade of his resources. Let him rather affect to be as impecunious as themselves, and outwardly suffer all the inconveniences of a hand-to-mouth existence; otherwise they will be almost certain to 'sponge' upon him. To this end, he should be careful to open his letters in private, and absolutely decline to share lodgings with a would-be companion.\* The instant the impression gains ground that he is not wholly dependent upon his salary for a livelihood, all manner of artifices will be resorted to to relieve him of his surplus cash, while the manager himself will take good care to put him off with honeyed words, instead of paying him even a portion of the salary that is his due. The world is made up of all sorts and conditions of men; the theatrical profession, too, has its shady characters, God knows!

\* After defraying our joint lodgings, and providing him with pocket-money to enable him to tide over an idle fortnight, a fellow-actor in the long ago unhandsonely made off with our wardrobe baskets.

## Actors' Landladies.

On a par with the excitements of extorting money from a close-fisted manager are those attendant on looking for lodgings. In all well-ordered touring companies visiting theatre towns, lodgings are week by week bespoken by the agent in advance for the ladies and gentlemen on his list, 'professional lodgings' being regularly advertised in the theatrical journals, as well as posted up within the portals of every stage entrance. A 'professional lodging' is Liberty Hall itself, but away from the beaten track of the touring companies lodgings are often hard to find, for the old prejudices against the theatre and play-acting folk still linger in the mind of the amateur landlady. Nor is it only in places 'off the map' that trouble can be encountered by a company newly arrived in the town. The search for lodgings in benighted spots where puritanical instincts have survived the broader spirit of the age is generally wearying to the flesh and mortifying to the spirit. A little personal adventure of this kind will never fade from our memory, but as it will read much better set forth in the first person, we will here quote it verbatim from one of our many fugitive contributions to the *Era* :

'It happened on my arrival in a town that had a reputation for harbouring more bigots than sensible folk. I had been warned by my fellow-actors (who

had visited the place before) to keep my profession studiously in the background if I did not wish to be shut out of every lodging I might encounter. At the first house where I made my application, I represented myself as a traveller. "What is it you travel in?" demanded the lady. "*In shoes*," I replied. This explanation being deemed satisfactory, the terms were next discussed. It was then I discovered her in her true character. She acknowledged herself to be a 'Christian'—and charged accordingly. Then she asked me what chapel I attended. I forget now whether I told her I was a Wesleyan or a Presbyterian, but whichever it was my answer gave her much pleasure. "I must tell you why I am so particular about such matters," she said. "It's not long ago since a neighbour of mine unknowingly took in an ungodly man who belonged to the theatre here—a follower of Satan and all his pomps. Oh, the agony that poor woman suffered all the week he was under her roof! So, you see, one must needs be careful. I don't know what your habits may be in the evenings, but my gentlemen lodgers always read a few tracts aloud to me after they come home from their business. You'll be very comfortable with me, though I say it myself. I'm a perfect mother to my lodgers; I am. They have no inducement to stop out at night, because they know my front-door is always locked at half-past ten o'clock, so as to keep them out of the temptations of the streets."

'This intelligence was a bit of a stunner. Still, as the theatre was only just round the corner, I



knew I could manage to be in betimes if I tried. By way of accounting for my evenings out, I explained that I found it necessary to meet one or two fellow-travellers (also in shoes) at a certain place every evening in order to compare notes on the business transacted during the day. Taken as a whole, I was pretty comfortable during the brief period of my stay under her roof. Yet I suspect the old girl must have had a bad quarter of an hour when, immediately after my departure, she discovered a playbill on the parlour sofa!

In striking contrast to this virtuous landlady was the one we encountered in the very next town visited. Again quoting from our article, 'Actors' Landladies,' in the *Era* :

'She was the very *beau-idéal* of an actor's landlady. But even an actor, travelled as he is, sometimes meets with a surprise. I confess I was considerably taken back when first I discovered her peculiarity. Each time she came into my room to lay something down on the table she would gracefully incline her head towards the floor, and at the same time raise one foot high in the air behind her. The spectacle of a short, middle-aged woman, much inclined to stoutness, acting in this manner was both diverting and shocking. After the first day I ventured to ask her the reason of it. "Lor' bless you, sir!" she exclaimed, "so you have found it out, too! I declare I shall never be able to rid myself of it. Use, they say, is second nature, and it's true." It then transpired that far back in her younger days



she had been in the ballet! Long before the expiration of my local engagement I had become so habituated to this strange performance that I scarcely noticed it.'

One cannot travel round the provinces in a professional capacity without gleaning much knowledge of the world and its ways. Even the prosaic landlady will sometimes affect a superior acquaintance with matters on which a mere man considers himself already well informed. One of these dear creatures of domesticity, we well remember, 'took us in' in a twofold sense. It was on a Sunday evening when we struck the bargain with her for a week's lodging, our arrangement being that we should quit her roof on the Monday morning, namely, on the ninth day. Judge, then, of our astonishment when she declined to rest satisfied with the half-sovereign we had agreed to pay for the week's accommodation! 'There are only six days in a week,' she declared. 'My husband goes to his work on Monday morning, and gets his money on Saturday night. As you came here on Sunday, your week was up on Friday night, so that makes another two nights due to me up to now.' This extraordinary reasoning, it struck us, was not at all 'according to Cocker'; but she stood firm against everything we had to say to the contrary, and foreseeing difficulties arising out of our own line of argument, we compromised the matter by paying her for one night's extra lodging rather than run the risk of losing our train.

## Adventures off the Stage.

The amusing adventures which fall to the lot of a touring actor would fill a volume, notwithstanding the asseveration of a well-known writer in a recent novel dealing with the stage, that 'the incidents in an actor's life are usually very few.' An actor's life is full of adventure. The ups and downs of the dramatic profession, sorrowful as they may often be at the time of their occurrence, offer abundant scope for merriment over an actor's supper-table, and limited indeed must have been the experience of that actor whose tongue is silent on such an occasion.

Speaking for ourselves, we have often found an opportunity to furnish our quota of narrative to a little coterie of actors assembled at a humble repast on the stroke of midnight—that solemn hour when it is said churchyards yawn, and unhappy wives fated to sit up for their belated spouses doubtless do the same. We think we can boast of even more than an actor's share of adventures off the stage. One of these will serve to make our statement good before resuming the thread of our practical discourse embraced by the title of this work.

We had established our lodgings in an upper chamber overlooking the street. On the Friday night, after an exhausting performance—it was a benefit night—we dragged our weary feet homewards,

went to bed by the pale light of the moon, and slept soundly. The next morning, whilst engaged at the dressing-table, we were not a little astonished to observe that the builder's signboard, ordinarily conspicuous on the opposite side of the way, had been removed several doors' distance up the street. This caused us to examine our surroundings, when the truth flashed upon us. We had let ourselves into a strange house, slept in a strange bed, and performed our ablutions at a strange toilet-table, in consequence of our latchkey having fitted the door of a similarly-constructed house in the same block as our lawful lodgings. Fortunately, the coast was clear for our departure, and the street door stood wide open. Equally fortunate was the circumstance that our own landlady was not in the way when we entered *her* domicile. We crept noiselessly up to our chamber, 'tumbled' the bed to make it appear as if we had passed the night in it, made a liberal use of soap and water for form's sake, then descended to breakfast. What that other landlady must have thought to herself on discovering the disordered state of her bedroom, we leave to the imagination!

From lodgings let us return to the players.



## Choosing a Professional Name.

When the stage was less fashionable than it is now, a young actor invariably changed his name on entering the profession. There was often very good reason for this, since so many persons took to the boards in direct opposition to the wishes of their guardians. If, sooner or later, however, they had the good fortune to command an appearance in a leading part at a theatre of high repute, they were generally advised to take refuge under an anonymous designation. Thus, they figured on the bills as 'a young gentleman [or young lady], his [or her] first appearance on the stage [or in this character].' There are still extant old playbills on which Mrs. Siddons, David Garrick, and many other bright luminaries of the theatrical firmament, were announced in this manner. After passing through the ordeal successfully, they again fell back upon the names originally adopted in their strolling days, or assumed their own patronymics.

Garrick made his first appearance at Ipswich under the name of Lydford. The future celebrated Dora Francis assumed the *nom de théâtre* of Mrs. Jordan at the suggestion of Tate Wilkinson, the manager, who gave her her first promising engagement, and whom she consulted on the matter. Said he: 'You have crossed the Jordan, so I'll call you Jordan.' The application was not particularly direct, albeit



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she had joined his company at Leeds after crossing over from Waterford.

It will doubtless be news to many of our readers to learn that, whereas in these days married actresses retain their original stage-names, or at any rate the prefix 'Miss,' those of the century gone by uniformly styled themselves 'Mrs.' This was a survival of the general custom of the ladies of our country, married and single (dating back to the days of the Merry Monarch), whose social prefix was under all circumstances 'Mistress,' in contradistinction to women of loose character, who were popularly designated 'Miss.' With the modern significance of the term 'mistress' we are well acquainted, but down to the early part of the present century a kept woman was alluded to as 'Mr. So-and-So's miss.' Hence we are familiar in stage annals with the names of Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Mrs. Bellamy, Mrs. Woffington, Mrs. Clive, and many more, though not one of them had entered the matrimonial state.

Nowadays fashion dictates the contrary. Of course there are exceptions. Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. Bernard Beere, Mrs. Brown-Potter, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell made their mark on the stage as society actresses, so that to change their names when they afterwards sought success on professional boards would have been a mistake—at least, from the managers' point of view. Mrs. Kendal rejoices in the style of 'the British Matron,' from her refusal to accept an engagement in which her devoted husband cannot

play the lover to her. Few married actresses have been so fortunate in their choice of parts. The late Mr. and Mrs. Dacre cherished the like fancy, but dual engagements could not always be commanded, and rather than suffer separation in a distant colony, they resolved to die together—a tragic incident which must be fresh in the mind of the reader. Truly success on the stage calls for sacrifices to which the common run of mortals are strangers.

Generally speaking, an actress clings to her professional name, 'Miss So-and-So,' as long as she adorns the stage. Managerial policy would seem to dictate that the fact of an attractive actress being married should not obtrude itself on a playbill. Indeed, one can imagine that in the eyes of the world the commercial value of a fascinating burlesque actress, for instance, is somewhat discounted by the public knowledge of there being a husband in the background. After all, the private lives of actors and actresses are things apart from those talents which attract an audience to the theatre. So extreme is this view in America that several managers who might be named decline to retain in their company a married couple, well knowing that the modern interviewing craze lays bare the domestic relations of our public notabilities. A certain well-known Transatlantic actor has recently been ousted from a lucrative engagement because he chose to marry a prominent actress in the same company, so they came to England in search of an opening.

At times a fictitious forename comes to be foisted

on to the *nom de théâtre* of an *artiste* from unexpected causes; witness Mrs. 'Perdita' Robinson, by virtue of the character in which she made her greatest mark. A modern instance of the same kind is Miss 'Rose' Norreys; as a matter of fact, her Christian name is Genie. There was also an old-time comedian named Norris, who, as long as he lived, went by the name of 'Jubilee Dicky,' from the part he made famous in Farquhar's *Constant Couple*. David Garrick came of a French family, the Garriques, whose name he anglicized into Garrick. The centenarian actor Macklin saxonized his Hibernian patronymic McLaughlin, which was certainly an advantage for professional purposes; while Braham, the singer, beheaded and curtailed his Jewish family name, Abrahams.

The choice of a *nom de théâtre* frequently has a well-thought-out significance. A young actor whom we had the good fortune to introduce to a London engagement took pride in the name of Ludford Barry; the first was his mother's maiden name, and the second he adopted out of his worship of Barry Sullivan, the celebrated Irish tragedian. Sir Henry Irving, when he first went on the stage, discarded his patronymic Brodribb in favour of that of the American writer Washington Irving, whose works he in his youth so much admired. It is almost needless to add that Sir Henry has taken the necessary steps to legalize the name of Irving for his two sons, Lawrence and Henry Brodribb.

Quite a number of actors have made their Christian



name—or one of their Christian names—do duty for a stage-name. Among these we may cite at random Messrs. George Alexander (George Alexander Samson), Arthur Cecil (Arthur Cecil Blunt), David James (David James Belasco), Fred Leslie (Frederick Leslie Hobson), Mons. Marius (Claude Marius Duplany), Horace Lingard and ‘Miss’ Alice Lingard (Mr. and Mrs. Horace Lingard Needham), H. H. Morell (the son of the late Sir Morell Mackenzie, the celebrated physician), and W. Lestocq (William Lestock Woolridge). Mr. Brandon Thomas played for some time under the stage-name of Mr. Brandon, as already stated on another page.

Some actors have simply inverted their names, as witness Mr. Lewis Waller (Mr. Waller Lewis) and Mr. Wenman (Mr. Newman). Mr. Lawrence D’Orsay was in his pre-theatrical days Mr. Dorset William Lawrence, and while as a boy at Merchant Taylors’ School his chums nicknamed him Dorsey, which, with a slight alteration in the spelling, suggested by his reading about the celebrated Count D’Orsay, supplied him with the ready-made *nom de théâtre*. The late Miss Lydia Foote was far from satisfied with her patronymic Legge when she coveted theatrical fame, so she changed it to the form which afterwards became exceedingly popular. Miss Ada Rehan was originally in private life Miss Ada Regan, a name which betrayed her Irish nationality, but a patriotic affectation on her part gave it its true pronunciation, which suggested a more professional mode of rendering it in print. Mr. John Hare euphonized his



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family name Fairs into its present form. The foregoing are merely representative, but they will serve as guides to the beginner.\*

As the stage-players of our time no longer bear the stigma of being classed as 'rogues and vagabonds,' a young actor can exercise an absolutely free choice in regard to a *nom de théâtre*, or retain his own proper name. Care should, however, be taken to avoid selecting a name which has already been appropriated. Among the many hundreds of actors and actresses of to-day, it is not at all easy to hit upon a euphonious stage-name that shall be original. Mistakes of this kind, made inadvertently, have caused, and are causing, infinite confusion. How often do we find an actor advertising that, owing to his name—it may even be his real name—no longer being his sole monopoly, he wishes in future to be known as Mr. So-and-So! The only safe course for the beginner is to consult the 'Professional Cards' in the *Era* and the *Stage*.

Foreign-sounding names should be chosen with caution; they have frequently led to unexpected

\* Unlike actors, public singers rarely think of changing their names, though they may exercise a fancy for italianizing them. Signor Foli was many years ago a Dublin carpenter, known as Jack Foley. Odoardo Barri is another Irishman—formerly a vocalist, but now a composer, having lost his voice through the shock of being a witness to the Great Fire of Chicago in October, 1871—his real name being Edward Barry. When Mr. Campbell first came out at the Royal Italian Opera, he metamorphosed himself into Signor Campobello.

results. For example, Mr. Herman Vezin had written-in to Charles Mathews times without number for an engagement, but the light-hearted comedian never deigned him so much as a reply. At last Mr. John Coleman introduced these two worthies in Mathews's dressing-room. Mr. Vezin was received with the utmost cordiality. 'Ah, Vezin!' Mathews exclaimed. 'Are you Vezin? An actor, too! My dear fellow, I never answered those letters because the fact is, I thought you were a conjurer, and I did all my hanky-panky business myself.' This was in allusion to a burlesque in which Mathews scored greatly by imitating the tricks of Professor Anderson, the Wizard of the North.

### Actors' Superstitions.

This appears to us the most convenient place to dispose of one or two superstitions which in the dramatic profession are so deep-rooted. With the exception of sailors, there is perhaps no class of persons more swayed by superstition than actors and actresses.

To open an umbrella on the stage is considered very unlucky; it is extremely doubtful whether the oldest playgoer has ever seen a performer court disaster by so doing. Peacocks' feathers are universally held in superstitious awe by the profession. It is said, and firmly believed, that no play in which

these elegant 'properties' have been employed has enjoyed a run. Again, it may have been noticed by non-professionals who have attended theatre rehearsals that actors and actresses never speak the 'tag,' *i.e.*, the last line or rhymed couplet of a play, before the play is actually produced 'at night,' out of the superstitious belief that failure would certainly ensue. This accounts for the altogether irrelevant substitution of such a phrase as 'God save the Queen,' or 'Ask a policeman,' for the real 'tag' at rehearsal.

Dramatic authors, too, have reason to be mindful of the 'tag,' as the following little story will show. When Victor Hugo converted his famous novel, 'Nôtre Dame de Paris' into an opera under the title of *Esmeralda*, he brought his libretto to a close with the ominous word 'fatality.' And a fatality everything connected with *Esmeralda* proved. The opera failed utterly. Madame Falcon, the prima-donna, lost her voice, and Mons. Nourrit, another distinguished *artiste*, committed suicide. A ship named after the opera foundered in the Irish Channel with all hands; while the Duke of Orleans, riding a valuable horse, to which he had given the name *Esmeralda*, in a steeplechase, came into collision with another horseman and was killed. Such were the consequences of Victor Hugo's rashness in setting aside the judgment of his theatrical contemporaries.

Managers and performers have a mutual objection to producing a new play, or inaugurating a season,



on a Friday. True enough, new plays have within the past few years been occasionally produced on a Friday, but they have never to our knowledge held the stage. The 'thirteen' superstition has also taken deep root in the dramatic profession. Failure is popularly supposed to attend the production of a new play when it falls on the thirteenth day of the month, though such hazardous ventures are rare. Actors and actresses fight shy of taking lodgings in a house which figures as No. 13 in a street, while leading *artistes* have been known to add a fictitious figure to their chamber-door when the unlucky number fell to their unwilling choice at a hotel.

'The man with a white hat' is a significant stock-phrase, implying an unfavourable reception for a new play. This had its origin in a spirited argument which a popular actor-manager carried on with a young man in the pit who wore a white hat on the first night of an important and highly unsuccessful production. Since then the presence of a pittite so crowned is considered to bode no good for the play newly set before the public.

What there should be in a cherry-wood stick to provoke misfortune surpasses understanding; still, the fact remains that experienced actors consider themselves superior to the alleged folly of handling a cherry-wood cane behind the foot-lights.

There must be something, too, in the gardenia that invests it with a superstitious symbolism in the mind of the player, for no actor would ever



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think of wearing this flower on the stage. The story is told of an actor who in his young and cynical days laughed at the idea that something would be certain to go wrong if he disported the odorous flower while playing his part; but a single night's experience sufficed to make him wise on the subject. He forgot his lines in the first act, made a false entrance in the second, was hissed for his performance in the third, and finally injured his knee by wandering into an ill-lighted scene-dock on his way to the dressing-room after the curtain had fallen.

Among other things which actors superstitiously persuade themselves they must *not* do in the theatre, is to whistle or sing in the dressing-rooms.

### The Theatre Cat.

The only portent of good luck generally recognised in the dramatic profession is the appearance of a black cat. It is easy to understand that a cat must be a very useful animal to have about a theatre, where the ravages of mice would do damage to the scenes. Every theatre has a cat, but it is always a black one. A grey or a white cat is speedily chased out of the building—why such a one should be deemed unlucky history deponeth not—but any number of black-coated grimalkins that choose to stray in by day or night are welcomed as good

omens. When the theatre cat walks across the stage during the performance, although it makes the audience titter and tends to mar the play, it is regarded by everyone behind the curtain as a sign of good luck. And if the animal so distinguishes itself on the first night of a new play, the play is certain to prove a success.

In their entertaining book, 'Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft: On and Off the Stage,' the talented wife (now Lady Bancroft) of the quondam actor-manager relates her own experiences of the theatre cat as follows:

'An odd coincidence was for many years connected with our management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre which may be worth telling; its relation, at any rate, will interest the superstitious and amuse the sceptical. I allude to the appearance by the stage-door on the eve of successful productions of a black cat, or rather kitten. The mystic time for this apparition was always night, and each fresh arrival was christened after a leading character of the coming play. It really sounds incredible, but on many Fridays preceding the Saturday productions our little harbinger of good luck ran in. It grew to be recognised by everyone as the foreteller of success; and when we arrived at the theatre on the Saturday, on which day we nearly always produced our plays or started any new venture, we were greeted by our hall-porter with the news, announced in all seriousness, "The black cat has arrived, madam!"

‘For many years our sable friend presented himself at the stage-door, passed through the hall, and ran straight into the theatre. On the Friday night after the last rehearsal of *The School for Scandal*, we were leaving the theatre on our way home, and I felt much disappointed that our ghostly visitor had failed us, when before we had reached the end of the street, a wee black thing, no bigger than a rat, rushed past us, as if he knew he was late. I stood still to watch, and saw him run through the hall-door, and then went home delighted. The little thing was christened Joseph Surface, and soon became a great pet with everyone, but, unlike his namesake, was a faithful friend. He was never so happy as during rehearsals, for he was on affectionate terms with all the company, and was more like a dog in sagacity. While we were abroad for this holiday he died, and was buried under the Haymarket stage by the servants, who had often fondled him. Everyone in the theatre felt a sincere pang of regret at the death of “dear Joe.” Had I asked either of my friends Mr. Burnand or Mr. Gilbert for an epitaph, they doubtless would have forestalled me in suggesting “*Requiescat in pace.*”’

Miss May Yohe is a firm believer in black cats as portents of success. According to her experience, directly the run of a play comes to an end, the theatre cat for the time being always dies or disappears. But this is not all. Before the next play




is produced, a new cat either strays into the theatre or is given, apparently by chance, to the charming *artiste*. Another of her superstitions leans towards a lucky yellow dress, which brings her prosperity whenever it is worn.

The unexpected appearance of the theatre cat among the performers 'at night' is certainly not conducive to serious acting. Shall we ever forget the incident of impersonating the apparition of the murdered Dei Franchi in the duel scene of *The Corsican Brothers*, at a large London theatre on a benefit night? Ah, no! At the very moment of coming up the trap, we were completely put out of countenance at beholding a monster black cat perched on the edge of the opening overhead. Personally we are not in love with cats at any time, but on this occasion the sight of the animal filled us with positive alarm, for there were not wanting indications that he intended to seize us by the nose or fly in our face. Since retreat was impossible, we could do nothing but set our teeth hard, and face the danger. Our only chance of safety lay in scaring the cat, and this we did most effectually. The instant the mechanism of the trap brought our head above the level of the boards, we gave vent to such a forcible hiss that the feline foe shrank back in terror, turned tail, and fled. Then arose a perfect shriek of laughter from the audience, not, as we thought at the time, due to the sudden scarification of the cat, but to the spectacle of a ghost with

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grinning teeth and distended cheeks. We were told afterwards that we only required a dab or two of carmine to realize the figure-head of Punch in his merriest mood.

### The 'Missing Word.'

 We have seen on a previous page that the abolition of the stock companies has virtually improved the prompter out of existence. In a *répertoire* company there may be a nominal 'assistant stage-manager' to hold the book; but since he always plays a part himself, he is rarely at hand when his services are most required. The prolonged agony of being stuck for the missing word is an experience not soon forgotten. Even veteran actors have no guarantee against a temporary lapse of memory. Charles Kemble was by no means certain of his lines in the parts he played so well. Whenever it could be arranged, he had a couple of girls in attendance on him dressed as pages, who were 'coached' up in his speeches to act as faithful prompters.

The prompter's box is not always the best position from which to render an actor timely aid in a dilemma. In French theatres the prompter posts himself in the very centre of the stage behind the footlights, like the chorus-master at the Opera. The advantage of this arrangement cannot be underrated, unsightly though the wooden screen behind

which he shelters himself must be to the audience. When the exigences of the play require an actor to remain well up the stage, or o.p. (opposite prompt entrance), the prompter's spoken word is of little service to him. It is not given to everyone to be a good prompter, to nicely discriminate when an actor is 'stuck' for a word, or merely pausing in the way of 'business,' and to be able to pitch his voice in a tone neither too high nor too low.

We are reminded of the late Tom Mead, who, being at a loss for the word—as he often was—looked towards the prompter. 'Rome' was the missing word that came. Mead was puzzled, but he made his way down to the first entrance o.p. 'I was at Rome,' exclaimed the prompter. 'I was at Rome,' repeated the actor. Then he stuck again, and stared at the prompter. 'Yes, I was at Rome,' said that official from his box. 'But what the devil was I *doing* at Rome?' cried Mead, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the entire house. This unexpected sally quite upset the prompter's equilibrium; he dropped the book, and the remainder of the farce had to be 'gagged' all through.



## Stage Stumbles.

What may be termed stage stumbles are exceedingly common. The best actors are not unfrequently caught tripping over a well-remembered line, and turning it into ridicule.

Tom Mead was a noted offender in this respect. On the first night of the production of *Macbeth*, Mead, as one of the Witches in the Blasted Heath Scene, instead of saying 'Spirit of a dragon's blood,' cried, to Irving's horror, 'Spirit of a *dragoon's* blood.' The Lyceum manager took him on one side after the scene was over, and said, 'I say, old man, it's "Spirit of a *dragon's*, not dragoon's, blood." See that it doesn't occur again.' Mead promised that it should not, and was much excited when he went on for the same scene on the following night. Sure enough, he cried loudly, 'Spirit of a *dragoon's* blood;' then, catching sight of Irving's face, he forgot all about his part, and stamping his foot in rage, walked off the stage, exclaiming, 'Done it again, by Jove!' 'Yes,' cried Irving angrily, 'and no mistake about it this time, either!'

An historic instance of the same kind is related of the representative of Miss Sterling in *The Clandestine Marriage*, who, trying to force an entrance to her sister Fanny's room, spoke of her maid as having 'locked the key and put the door in her pocket.'

This was quite 'on a piece'—as an American would say—with Miss Davenport, who, as Mrs. Heidelberg in the same play, said, 'I could have sworn I put the keys of the pocket in my cupboard.' Yet another famous stage stumble was the exclamation, 'She's coming down the candle with a corridor in her hand'!

Perhaps the most amusing of all stage stumbles was the following: When Quin was playing Justice Balance in *The Recruiting Officer*, he addressed Peg Woffington, who was playing Sylvia, 'What age were you when your dear mother was married?' This he quickly corrected by adding, 'I ask what age were you when your mother was born?' Her wit was ready enough: she replied, 'I cannot answer your question, sir, but I can tell you how old I was when my mother died.'

Instances like these simply cause harmless merriment, but plays have been utterly damned by an infelicitous line faithfully delivered by a performer who had not the knack of averting coming mischief. Thus, at the Olympic Theatre a new play was received with mute silence until one of the characters cried, 'Flesh and blood can stand it no longer!' This was the signal for ironical cheers and 'cat-calls' from pit and gallery.

### The Value of an Impromptu Wit.

A happy resourcefulness on the stage at the psychological moment is invaluable. The celebrated comedienne, Miss Fanny Horton, was once roundly hissed for her performance. She immediately paused in her part, and stepping down to the footlights, addressed the audience: 'What is it you dislike, my playing or my person? My playing I can better—at least, I hope to be able to please you—but my person I cannot alter.' Her ready wit saved the situation, for the hisses of a moment before gave place to a spontaneous burst of applause.

A modern actor at the Surrey Theatre—to be sure, he was a low comedian—finding himself stuck for the word, and the prompter away from his post, suddenly bawled out the utterly irrelevant line, 'Oh, I do like jam!' which at once put the house in a roar, and by the time the merriment had subsided the prompter had made his reappearance to see what was the matter. That prince of 'gaggers,' Mr. Arthur Roberts, was once the means of averting a panic in a theatre by his ready wit. Some odds and ends of scenery had taken fire, and a very perceptible odour of burning alarmed the spectators. A panic seemed to be imminent, when Mr. Arthur Roberts appeared on the stage. 'Ladies and



gentlemen,’ he said, ‘compose yourselves. There is no danger. I give you my word of honour, there is no danger.’ The audience did not seem reassured. ‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ continued the comedian, rising to the necessities of the occasion, ‘confound it all! do you think if there was any danger *I’d* be here?’ The panic collapsed. Of course, before a young actor can thus successfully turn the tables on an audience, he must be thoroughly at home in the part he is sustaining.

### ‘ Doubling ’ Parts.

Hard as the ordinary work of a *répertoire* company undoubtedly is, it is emphasized when the beginner finds himself cast for two distinct characters in the same play. This is called ‘doubling.’ Where the travelling expenses of a touring company are a consideration, a manager generally produces a round of plays with as few people as can possibly be arranged. By so doing he cuts down his salaries also, and thereby deceives the public; for though the full cast of the play appears on the bills, he takes care to insert fictitious names against those characters which the actors and actresses are called upon to ‘double.’

Some doubles are very convenient, as, for example, when a character is killed off early in the play; this enables the same actor to impersonate another

character after a short interval to change his costume and alter his 'make-up.' More frequently, however, an actor plays two different characters in alternate acts, or even scenes, and then he must be very well up in his business to avoid mixing the two parts up, by speaking the lines set down for one character in the costume appropriate to the other. The hurry-scurry of making a 'quick change' in the dressing-room several times during the evening certainly adds to the excitement behind the scenes. This is particularly the case when one of the parts so doubled chances to be that of a negro.

An amusing instance of this kind came within our own experience long years ago, as related in 'Roughing-it on the Stage.' Having appeared as St. Clair in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, we rushed off to the dressing-room directly the curtain had fallen on the act to make up for Sambo, who was all but 'discovered' in the following act. 'A quick-change *artiste*' could scarcely have divested himself of the habiliments proper to the character of St. Clair with greater alacrity than we displayed on that occasion, and the burnt cork was already applied to our face when the stage-manager looked in to report that the audience insisted on our responding to a 'call' before the curtain. 'But it's impossible,' was the reply; 'I'm just making up for Sambo.' Remonstrances were of no avail, for the boisterous applause continued until we reluctantly made our bow in acknowledgment of the compliment. But the audience quite failed to recognise the character

they had applauded in the sable-visaged mortal who now stood before them. Our appearance completely took them by surprise, and when, amid hisses and yells of disapprobation, an infuriated galleryite bawled out, 'Get off! go away! who sent for you?' we made haste to retire.

If the business of doubling parts in alternate acts imposes difficulties upon the player, what must it be to essay a dual impersonation in one and the same scene! Sir Henry Irving's remarkable dual performance in *The Lyons Mail*, and that of Mr. Beerbohm Tree in *A Man's Shadow*, are familiar to everyone; but since these rapid alternations of character involve only a change of costume, they must be held to sink into insignificance beside a not very well-known achievement of R. W. Elliston. We will give it in the words of Henry Barton Baker, whose interesting work, 'Our Old Actors,' we have already adverted to:

'During the Bath recess, when not playing in town, he (Elliston) indulged in strolling, took the Theatres Royal, Wells and Shepton Mallet, with a company of half a dozen people, playing himself Hamlet and harlequin, and Macbeth and clown in one night. On occasion he "doubled" the parts of Richard III. and Richmond. In the fifth act of the play these two characters succeed each other in every alternate scene, but meet in the last for the fight. A little adjustment of dress and a little alteration of voice sufficed to mystify the rustics until the climax, when a scene-shifter dressed up



was thrust on to represent Richmond, with directions to keep his back well to the audience, not open his lips, but at the cue "fight like the devil," while Elliston, shifting about his position and changing his tones, alternately hurled defiance at Richard and Richmond.'

### The Portable Theatre.

This brings us to speak of the lowest rung of the professional ladder, the portable theatre. Acting in a 'portable' is the modern form of the strolling playing which obtained in bygone days—those none too halcyon days when great actors and actresses performed in barns or in the largest room of an inn by sufferance of the local squire. The stage aspirant without money or friends to advance his professional interests, who is thoroughly in earnest, and prepared to rough it for a time as a stepping-stone to higher things, need not disdain to join a company of players in a booth. Let it not be imagined that, once attached to such a rough school, he would be debarred from all opportunity of bettering himself. Far from it. He would undoubtedly learn his business thoroughly, and the rough schooling so gained should prove a fitting preparation for experience of a higher order in a 'fit-up' touring company. A would-be actor thrown entirely on his own resources for a livelihood may find 'writing-in'

to touring managers a tedious and unsatisfactory procedure; an engagement in a booth is easily found. Vacancies in a portable theatre are invariably advertised in the *Stage*. A stated salary in these humble playhouses is a thing unknown, as we have already observed; sharing terms on the Commonwealth system are the order of the day. 'Terms, shares; houses checked,' so runs the familiar advertisement.

Of course, we do not recommend the portable theatre to the ambitious would-be actor who can bide his time until the cherished opportunity offers itself to join a *répertoire* touring company, or to obtain a small part in a London theatre. There are portables and portables. Many of those which abound in the country at large, more particularly in Scotland, are in all respects well-appointed establishments, and, what is more, there are no anxieties connected with the honorarium which falls to the actor's due. Some approach to a livelihood can generally be earned in a 'portable,' which is more than can be said of the majority of inferior touring companies.

That there are unpleasantnesses to be borne with in the rough-and-tumble life of a booth is not to be denied, for we may say at once that the traditional barn would be preferable to the dilapidated structure which some folk nowadays dignify with the name of a 'portable theatre.' The following letter in the *Era*, headed 'Six Nights in a "Portable,"' tells its own story:

'SIR,  
"Awfully jolly life! Dress with the ladies, and all that sort of thing, don't cher know!" said, I remember, by one of those Johnnies who are so fond of coming "behind." At Moresodden, in Yorkshire, recently I certainly thought we should have had to "dress with the ladies, and all that sort of thing, don't cher know." But the good-hearted landlady of the old inn across the waste where the "portable" stands helped us out of the difficulty. There are in our glorious profession an overflowing majority who do not know what a "portable" is. I have had this one photographed—a few sacks covered with tar on the top of a few planks. In the summer the tar melts and drips through; in the winter the snow does the same thing. This month being a peculiarly wet one, the rain has gone one better on both the snow and the tar. Our masterpiece is played in parts in evening dress. At Moresodden we managed to meander through in mackintoshes. The "staff" consists of a gentleman ludicrously dubbed the "manager" and two beclugged boys. On Monday, by removing four bits of orange-box nailed together, which comprised the "stage-door," I entered, to find myself with an inspector of the S.P.C.A. Satisfied that there were no animals entombed in the place, and that consequently he could not give the proprietor three months, he was going, when I asked him if he knew that human beings would be the occupants for six nights. He only said, "Oh, the players!" and passed out, resplendent with gold braid, to see that someone up the street didn't overfeed his dog. Later we "hung" two "cloths." The weight pulled the roof out, and let some more rain in. Desperate indignation from "the manager" of the wooden enterprise. As the day proceeded, some of the company came to hand. Four had been walking about the best part of the night, as every respectable house was closed against them. Towards the close of the day they got comfortably settled, but a mighty flood swept down the main streets, filling their



sitting-room waist-high, and driving them like rats to the garret. There they remained two days and nights, foodless, drinkless, lightless, with only the off-chance of a stick of celery, a cabbage, or a drowned chicken floating down on the bosom of the tide. That a wretched hole like this "portable" should be entirely destitute of dressing-room accommodation, of course, goes without saying. Where we did put on our clothes and take them off the rain continually wetted us through. I have a zinc lining in my basket, so expected some immunity; but the rain, which drained out of the other baskets, filled mine, and stayed there brimful. On our last night but one, three of the sacks which formed the roof blew off, and during our stay they were not replaced, allowing just a little more elementary mischief. And it was to this (and worse) that a respectable company had been inveigled! The humiliation need not be enlarged upon—the awful risk of life, the setting of those deadly seeds of by-and-by some consuming disease, to which we must turn our attention. For the sake of those pitiable creatures whose existence is for ever amongst these charnel-houses, the question of licensing unsound wooden places for dramatic representations demands immediate and forcible public inquiry.

‘Yours truly,

‘A SATURATED ACTOR.’

It is to be hoped there are not many ‘portables’ of this description; the above letter-writer must have fallen in with the worst. The more general complaints which the educated young novice-actor might have to lodge against playhouses of this character would be the rough-and-ready style of the performances, the hole-and-corner dressing accommodation, and not unfrequently the ‘going on

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parade' for the edification of a gaping crowd, after the manner of a Richardson's Show. Properly speaking, there is in our day a difference between a 'booth' and a 'portable,' and the difference consists in this: In the former there is no outside show whatsoever, whereas in the latter the actors and actresses are expected to strut about in their costumes on an elevated platform outside until a sufficient audience has by much vociferation and instrumentation been attracted within, while, moreover, there are always two or three performances in one evening, and as many as half a dozen on a Saturday. Short as the performances under these conditions must be, they are liable to be still further curtailed when a fresh audience has gathered outside, in which event a loud inquiry for 'John Audley!' is a signal for winding up the 'show.' Then the company go once more on parade until the new audience has filled the 'house.'

It is said that Shuter, the celebrated comedian, who began life as a strolling player, was the inventor of this method of bringing the performance to an unexpected termination.\*

Nor was Shuter the only actor who passed from a strolling experience to the regular stage. Tom King, another famous comedian and a dramatist to boot, who afterwards held the proud position of stage-manager at Drury Lane under David Garrick,

\* In his day the signal was: 'Is Hiram Festiman re?'

was a fellow-stroller with Ned Shuter in the Kentish barns and at Bartholomew Fair; it was while acting in Yates's booth at Windsor that Garrick found him out and engaged him for Old Drury. Barton Booth ran away from home at the age of seventeen to join a company of strolling players in the Eastern Counties, and also appeared at Bartholomew Fair, from which rough training-ground he passed into the regular theatrical circuits, and subsequently won his way, after a brief engagement at Dublin, to Drury Lane.

Miss O'Neill, one of the best emotional actresses the stage has ever known, was the daughter of a poor strolling player, and very rough was her professional experience, even from childhood. It so happened that she was acting in a booth in Dublin at the very time when the 'star' actress at the Theatre Royal of that city broke faith with the manager, and almost compelled him to close the house; but someone suggested that the very clever Miss O'Neill might help him out of the difficulty. This hint being acted upon, 'the great Miss O'Neill' of the future was at once entrusted with the part of Juliet, in which she scored a great success, with the result that she remained at the Theatre Royal until John Kemble saw her, and offered her a three years' engagement at Covent Garden.

If it be urged that these examples do not apply at the present day, let us hasten to state that many modern actors, rather than remain idle, do not



hesitate to fill in the dead season by accepting an engagement in a booth, even concurrently with their announcement in the theatrical journals that they are 'resting,' or 'at liberty.'\* By way of emphasizing this truth, we may add that several of our associates at the 'Theatre Royal,' Llanelly, South Wales, which, despite its proud title, was in many respects inferior to a booth (*vide* 'Roughing-it on the Stage'), only spent their time at that ramshackle temple of the drama as a temporary resource. The juvenile gentleman soon afterwards went on a starring tour with a well-known actress; the leading lady met with an engagement at a regular theatre of repute, and two years later played an important part in one of our own dramas produced in London; while the

\* Still lower in the professional scale than the portable theatre is what is called the 'penny gaff.' An old playgoer recently contributed this personal reminiscence to a popular morning newspaper: 'I remember seeing Arthur Dillon play Macbeth in my early days under very funny circumstances. Dillon was the Surrey "heavy" under Davidge, but being out of an engagement, opened "a gaff" down a street in Walworth. The auditorium was over a cowshed, and I had a reserved seat at twopence. Arthur Dillon played Macbeth, and Charles Dillon Macduff, First Witch, and one or two other parts. To make the affair more ludicrous, the dresses did not arrive—finances were low—and all appeared in private dress! That was my first peep at Charles Dillon on the stage, and my last was when he played Macbeth at the "Lane" under Chatterton's management in 1878. What a jump from the Walworth "gaff" to Drury Lane Theatre!'

low comedian (Mr. Dash himself) was even then engaged for the pantomime at a leading Edinburgh theatre, and subsequently we stumbled upon him fulfilling a highly successful engagement at a West-End theatre. The fluctuations of actors' fortunes form not the least part of the romance of professional life.

Therefore the novice-actor need not be deterred from commencing at the very foot of the ladder if his circumstances be such that he cannot wait for an opportunity to tread the boards of a recognised theatre. Those who are bred and born in a booth are fated to remain there, so also are broken-down old stagers who have no better prospect for their declining years; but there is hope of betterment for the young and energetic, who wisely regard a little roughing-it only as a means of gaining experience. Among the advantages of a brief engagement in a 'portable' as compared with a 'fit-up' tour may be mentioned the small amount of actual study in the getting-up of parts, for the rehearsals are conducted in a very slipshod fashion, and the actors are by no means expected to be letter-perfect in the text, some approximation to the general drift of the speeches being all that is considered necessary. Indeed, in many cases the members of a family attached to a portable theatre cannot even read or write; the 'situations' are explained to them, they are told what to say and do, and they simply improvise their speeches for themselves as they proceed. For an apt illustration of this rough-and-ready method of

pleasing the groundlings, the reader may be referred to our article entitled 'A Drama in Penn'orths,' which appeared in the *Era*, March 21, 1896.

### Actors' Salaries.

We have seen already that the commonwealth system takes the place of a stated salary among the performers in the portable theatre. If on occasion an exception be made—this could only happen when the ruling spirit of the 'portable' is a widow with grown-up daughters figuring as actresses—the salary offered would amount to the magnificent sum of £1 a week 'for leading business,' combined with stage management (possibly also scene-painting), and haranguing the crowd from the parade platform outside. In small stock companies, such as still exist in out-of-the-way places, where some typical old stager, tired of 'resting,' has hired a dilapidated fifth-rate theatre by the week with borrowed money, his advertisement for 'people' generally contains the words, 'Salary low, but sure,' thirty shillings a week being considered adequate for a leading actor or lady, the familiar 'one-one' (a guinea) for other lines of business, and fifteen shillings for the small 'utility actor.'

All things considered, the emoluments of touring actors are still very much on a par with those which



ruled in the old stock company days. A small salary went a long way in those days, when an actor was settled for the best part of a year in a comfortable lodging, and took his meals with the landlady's family ; whereas now, under the touring system, a six nights' lodging is by no means economical, and the actor being free to enjoy himself during the day, has so many inducements to spend all he earns. A first-class company sent round the provinces by a West-End manager, or the private enterprise of a star actor or actress, is a very desirable connection from a financial point of view ; but in all ordinary touring organizations the salaries are cut down to the lowest possible limit. Where a country manager can exact a premium for the privilege of playing a small part on tour, he does so ; indeed, there are very few inferior companies in which amateurs and novices of both sexes are not received ; if they do not actually pay a premium, their names are absent from the salary list. But to come to those more experienced, who do not see the force of giving their services for nothing. Salaries are in all cases regulated by the status of the company. From twenty-five to thirty shillings a week for a small part, from £2 to £3 for a line of business, with a maximum of £5 for heavy or juvenile lead, may be said to strike an average of an actor's salary on tour. Choristers rarely command more than thirty-five shillings, while the 'show-girls' in a burlesque company have often to be content with less. This is why so many of the smaller members of a travel-

ling theatrical company share the cost of bed and board.

With regard to London theatres—we are not now speaking of the suburban houses, which are nowadays run on provincial lines—managers pay good salaries, but it must also be borne in mind that wigs and modern costumes cost money, and these must be of the best. The extreme probability of the play for which an actor has been specially engaged failing to attract the public is always a substantial set-off against the highly respectable salary which a West-End engagement represents, and side by side with the fact of being temporarily thrown idle, an engagement for a subsequent production naturally involves the *artistes* in expenses anew. Even the one-line actor is expected to provide his own wig and a good suit of clothes for the stage, though his salary may not amount to more than twenty-five or thirty shillings a week. A guinea would be the sum paid for a 'walking part.' From £2 to £5 a week might be set down as the average salary of a subordinate actor in a West-End theatre, according to the part he is cast for.

From this point upwards it is difficult to generalize, since actors of position are very prone to parade their stamped 'engagements,' from which it would appear to the uninitiated that they earn almost princely salaries. The fact is, there is in many cases also a private agreement which, on being compared with the document actually stamped at Somerset House, would show a marked

discrepancy in the figures. Hence when an actor emphasizes his boast that he is getting £20 or £25 a week by exclaiming, 'My boy, I can show you the "engagement"!' this information must be taken with the proverbial grain of salt, for he is most likely taking but half that sum from the weekly treasury. Actors and actresses of undoubted popularity who really draw the public, no matter what the play, or the location of the theatre may be, are worth the large salaries which pass current among playgoers, but these are notable exceptions, their emoluments forming a marked contrast to the £7, £10, £12, and sometimes £15 a week paid to the exponents of secondary characters. The maximum weekly salary of a chorister in a West-End theatre is £2.

### 'Making-up' for the Stage.

On the subject of 'making-up' for the stage little need be said. Proficiency in this department of the actor's art can only be acquired from practical experience, by watching others and so finding out what to do in the dressing-room. Existing books on 'Theatrical Make-up,' with coloured plates, were very serviceable to actors ten or twenty years ago, but they are now obsolete. The prepared chalk, fuller's earth, powdered blue, rouge, carmine, burnt



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cork, camel's-hair brush, hare's-foot, and one or two dry paints which in the old days formed an actor's stock-in-trade, no longer suffice for present requirements; elaborate grease paints have completely supplanted them, except, perhaps, in the portable theatre.

These grease paints are identical with the composition which formerly went by the name of 'wig-paste,' whose sole function was to secure an actor's wig to his forehead and conceal the joining. The flesh-coloured grease paint still performs the same duty; but, like all the other tints—the 'light-red' and 'dark-red,' employed for heightening the complexion after a paler groundwork has been laid on, excepted—it is known by a number (3), and sold in sticks. Chemists almost everywhere now deal in grease paints. The 'store-price' is 4½d. per stick. As many as twenty numbers are kept in stock, but there is really no necessity for the beginner to be extravagant over his initial outlay for making-up requisites. The two-guinea 'make-up box,' so generally recommended by the theatrical wig-maker, bespeaks the well-to-do amateur. A fit-out of about half a dozen of the lowest numbers will, for ordinary purposes, serve the young actor or actress very well for a long time. In addition to the grease paints, a black and brown lining pencil; a cake of lip-salve; some yellow chrome as a groundwork for old men's faces; cotton-wool roughed over for pimples, Bardolph noses, or bloated cheeks; and powdered blue for giving the chin an unshaven appearance, or producing hollow cheeks, should be procured.

Now that they have the grease paints, ladies may be advised to use the powder-puff sparingly, except on their arms, neck, and shoulders. Let actors and actresses, however, remember that it is not simply the *face* which must be made up ; the neck and ears must have equal attention, or else audiences will discern plainly the line of demarcation between the paint and the natural skin. Amateurs may not be aware, perhaps, that artificial beards, moustaches, whiskers, and eyebrows can be deftly fashioned out of crêpe hair, and affixed to the face with white hard varnish.\* Professional actors never buy these hirsute appendages ready-made. As to the mode of applying the grease paints, printed instructions would be of very little use ; the beginner must experiment for himself, both at the theatre and in private. The readiest way to remove one’s make-up is to rub a little lard or vaseline into the paint, then wipe off the whole with a special dry towel.

Some really wonderful effects can be produced by actors who pay the requisite attention to ‘ making-up.’ Mr. Beerbohm Tree is a perfect master of the art. Those who saw him play Sir John Falstaff and Captain Swift at the Haymarket Theatre could not easily persuade themselves that the performer of these two widely-different characters was one and the same *artiste*.

During the run of *Jim the Penman* at the same house, Mr. Tree ran down to Oxford to play the

\* White hard varnish may be procured by the penny-worth at any oilman’s store.

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part of Iago in a special matinée performance of *Othello* at the University. The length of the tragedy and the inevitable speech at its close delayed him so considerably that he found it quite impossible to don his ordinary attire in time to catch his train back to London. He had foreseen this, however, and taken his Haymarket 'props' down to Oxford with him, intending to 'change' from Iago to Hartfeld *en route*. A cab soon whisked him off to the railway-station, and having 'tipped' the guard to give him a first-class compartment to himself and lock him in, he commenced to undress as the train steamed away from the platform. When the first stopping-place was reached, the guard, on passing the carriage-window, was much surprised to see his passenger transformed into a clean-shaven gentleman. 'This looks rather dicky!' he said to himself, oblivious of the fact that the Haymarket actor-manager had previously worn a stage costume under his long overcoat. By the time the train drew up at the only remaining stopping-place, where tickets were to be collected, Mr. Tree had assumed the Hartfeld wig and hook nose, and effected a complete change of attire. His forbidding countenance now confirmed the guard's suspicions, the more so when it was discovered that he had lost his ticket! 'Come, now,' he said; 'this won't do. You're one of those men who live by scheming; I know your sort. Honest people don't alter their phizog like that.' Some explanation was necessary before Mr. Tree was enabled to hie away to the Haymarket performance.



A similar experience once befell Mr. Toole, after changing from an old man into a young one in a four-wheeled cab.

Mr. John Hare has been for so many years associated in the public mind with elderly rôles that no one who has never seen him off the stage would credit him with being as young as he really is. Even Mr. Gladstone fell a victim to the popular delusion. He had often enjoyed a chat with Mr. Hare during the run of *A Pair of Spectacles*, but it had always been when the actor-manager was made up for the stage. Shortly after this highly-successful play was taken off the boards, the great statesman and the actor met at the table of a mutual friend. Most of the guests were known to Mr. Gladstone, but during the dinner he inquired of his hostess the names of those whom he had not met before. Looking towards Mr. Hare, he asked, ‘Who’s that?’ ‘Mr. John Hare,’ was the reply. ‘Oh yes,’ said Mr. Gladstone; ‘I know his father, the manager of the Garrick Theatre.’

The young actor who wishes to distinguish himself by the elaborateness or originality of his make-up cannot do better than to make a mental note of the interesting personalities he meets with out of doors, in trains, buses, and trams—everywhere, in fact, ‘where men most do congregate.’ Some of our most popular comedians and character actors have quite a collection of rough colour-sketches, executed from memory, to draw upon when they are cast for a new impersonation.

## Benefits.

Actors' benefits are virtually things of the past; about the only benefits one hears of nowadays are those taken by the 'principal boy' in a pantomime, and the leading lady in a small *répertoire* touring company. In the old days a seasonal benefit fell to the share of each representative of a 'line of business' in a hard-working stock company, and this was generally a substantial set-off to his salary, since his many months' residence in a town enabled him to count upon a goodly number of supporters, particularly if he had established himself a favourite. Benefits were not *always* profitable, however. Charles Kemble used to tell the story of a French pantomimist and dancer who was in the habit of taking a benefit once a year from a sense of duty, but he was never known to clear his expenses by the venture. On one such occasion he appeared before the curtain with a beaming countenance, and after making a polite bow, conveyed his thanks in these terms: 'Dear public, moche oblige; very good benefic; only lose half a crown dis dime. *I gom again!*'

Nowadays there are no benefits to augment an actor's earnings—the touring system has swept them away. This is in some respects good for the actors—the 'responsibles' and 'general utilities' especially—who had terrible work before them to get up two

or three heavy parts at a few hours' notice, not merely once in a way, but it might be every other week. And the plays put up for a benefit were rarely of a high order, the policy of the *bénéficiaire* naturally being to fill the house with a certain 'draw.' So that on the score of gaining experience, these auxiliary parts were not to be compared with the downright hard work involved in supporting a 'star' in half a dozen different characters during a week devoted to the 'legitimate.' We have only to note the announcements of an occasional benefit at the only London theatre still run on old-fashioned stock company lines to judge of the educational value of the plays set before the audience on a benefit night; witness *Sweeney Todd*, *The Dumb Man of Manchester*, and other delicious examples of the Minor Drama!

We cannot but think it would be a move in the right direction if the 'bespeak night' for the benefit of the leading lady in a fit-up touring company were once and for all time abolished. Few things are more humiliating than the position of an actress compelled to push the sale of tickets from house to house in the small towns—the 'smalls,' in theatrical parlance—for her alleged benefit, though she rarely benefits by the transaction. The play is generally *East Lynne*, eminently calculated to draw money from the pockets and tears from the eyes of the townsfolk; and it is always presented on a Friday night, when business is proverbially none of the best. If the actress happens to be the manager's wife, well



and good ; if not, depend upon it she has no direct interest in the success of her supposed benefit, other than to retain her engagement. Taking this hard fact into consideration, one feels tempted to echo the asseveration of a cynical writer, ' Theatre bills always lie.' When the benefit dodge is foisted upon the simple inhabitants in out-of-the-way-places, they certainly do.

### Calls before the Curtain.

'Calls' were formerly reserved for a benefit night ; in our time they have become all too common. The modern system of calling all the principals before the curtain at the end of each act tends most completely to destroy the dramatic illusion. Can anything be more ridiculous than the reappearance of an actor who has just been stretched lifeless upon the boards, smiling and bowing, 'with all his blushing honours thick upon him'? After the termination of the play, when the curtain (where, oh where, is the green baize now?) has finally closed in the picture, the speedy return to the footlights of an *artiste* who has scored heavily throughout the evening may be condoned, even welcomed ; but the senseless march past, one by one, of *all the dramatis personæ* from p.s. to o.p., which obtains in our suburban and provincial theatres, cannot be sufficiently deprecated. Everyone in the profession knows full well that these 'calls' are not to be considered as spontaneous compliments from the

auditorium, for the 'working of a call' is nightly brought about by a dexterous shaking of the r.s. edge of the curtain on the part of stage-managers lost to all sense of the dramatic fitness of things. Such a custom would have been impossible in the days of the old green curtain, which was not to be detached from the proscenium. If there was a 'call' at all, it was confined to the star and the leading lady, who bowed their acknowledgments from the proscenium door r.s., and on special occasions only walked across the stage to retire at the proscenium door o.p. Such a 'call before the curtain' was infinitely more dignified and worthy of the traditions of the drama than the present insane custom of squeezing between the proscenium and the act-drop, or, worse still, of striding on the stage while the ponderous roller of said act-drop is being pulled back by a burly scene-shifter in full sight of the audience, who also for the nonce obtain gratuitous glimpses of the scenery being 'struck' and of stage hands and property men hurrying to and fro behind. If—now that the proscenium doors have been abolished and the stage room behind the footlights has been reduced to the vanishing-point—actors and actresses *must* respond to the hearty plaudits of an audience, common-sense should dictate the taking of a 'call' at the close of the play on the stage itself, as at the Lyceum, the curtain being raised for the purpose.

'We very properly deride the old custom,' wrote Charles Dickens the Younger in the *Theatre*,

October, 1895, 'of allowing patrons of the drama, who by their distinction or notoriety were considered entitled to the privilege, to occupy seats upon the stage during the performance—a custom which obtained in England until Garrick put an end to it, and in France until its abolition was brought about by Voltaire. But from the point of view of stage illusion, was this so very much worse than the senseless habit of "calling" actors and actresses, which has by degrees grown into a well-nigh intolerable nuisance? It is said that the custom arose out of the enthusiasm which Edmund Kean's performance of Lucius Junius Brutus produced upon an audience, who declined to leave the theatre until the actor had bowed his acknowledgment of their plaudits, and it is probably owing to its gratification of the personal vanity of individual managers and players that the custom has since then become so firmly established.

'Something, perhaps, may be said in favour of such an expression of an audience at the end of the play, but the appearance of the whole company after an act, grouped upon the stage without any reference to the proceedings in which they have just been engaged, is fatal to the preservation of any illusion, while such a thing—now, happily, rare—as the return to the stage, during the progress of a scene, of an actor or actress who has just made an effective exit is simply an outrage on any sense of dramatic propriety. The conventionalities of the stage have generally been exaggerated at the opera, and it used to be a regular thing for Manrico in the *Trovatore*



to emerge from his prison after the great duet, returning to it quite calmly after bowing to the audience hand-in-hand with the lately-agonized, but now smiling, Leonora. This was an extreme case, but things very nearly as bad have been seen in many London theatres. The farce of handing baskets of flowers across the footlights to the leading and other ladies has pretty nearly killed the bouquet nuisance, which was such a terrible stumbling-block to the most strenuous make-believers, and now only finds favour with a certain class of Transatlantic variety actresses, who are so absolutely unreal to begin with that there is really, in their case, no illusion to be spoiled.

‘The system of “calls” is not only a thoroughly bad one, but it has produced another even worse than itself. This is the custom of speech-making in front of the curtain, which has been adopted by managers with quite a fatal alacrity. When this first became the fashion is not recorded. Managers in earlier days used to “give out” a successful new play for repetition until further notice, and sometimes, but not always, delivered a farewell address at the end of the season; but to this latter arrangement, at all events, there is little objection to be made. But the managers of to-day seem to be mainly anxious to cultivate the acquaintance of their audiences outside the stage setting which is their proper sphere, and are ready, at the mildest cry of “Speech!” from pit and gallery, to come forward with a few more or less carefully-prepared im-

promptus. And the practice sometimes brings disaster with it. Not infrequently the speech is interrupted by some dissatisfied spectators, and degenerates into an unseemly squabble between manager and a part of the audience, and I do not think that there exists a single speech-making manager who has not, on more than one occasion, said things for which he has been sorry afterwards.'

### The Green Baize.

The son of the great novelist was a gallant defender of the best traditions of the drama, and he never tired of asserting that the time-honoured green baize should be restored to the proscenium. We must confess to a pardonable fondness for the once-familiar 'rag' ourselves. No kind of curtain has ever been devised to hang so well, to screen off the stage from the auditorium so effectually, or to rise and fall in such graceful waves, as that which is now so seldom met with. Our earliest recollections of the play are intimately associated with the green baize. What says Charles Lamb, speaking of his first visit to the theatre at the age of six? 'When we got in, and I beheld the great green curtain that veiled a heaven to my imagination, which was soon to be disclosed, the breathless anticipations I endured!' Truly, there was an air of mystery about that great, dark, smooth surface in the dim irreligious light of the turned-down chandelier and the white and green 'floats'—now, alas! hidden away in a

whitewashed trench along the edge of the stage—which no new-fangled contrivances can resuscitate or conjure up. Sombre as it appeared, it stood out before our eyes and appealed to our imaginations as strongly as does the white sheet at a magic-lantern show in the surrounding darkness. We felt with Elia that there untold delights would shortly be unfolded before our eyes, and the faintest sound of a hammer behind that mystic veil only quickened the fancy. Then, when the prompter's bell 'rang in' the orchestra, and the 'floats,' being turned up a little, cast a subdued light upon the lower portion of the green baize, our expectations were raised to the highest pitch. Not a single glimpse did we ever obtain of the stage while the preparations were going forward; the curtain-rings, so nicely adjusted to the wire-rope on either side of the proscenium, prevented that most effectually. And when at last, to the enlivening strains of the orchestra, the great green curtain arose before our eyes, it vanished, as it seemed, in an instant. Under the new order of things the old charm of going to the play has completely departed. Little interest we take in the painted curtain, with whose minutest detail we have long become familiar; little enough of veiled delights does it suggest to the youthful imagination. As we visit the same theatre again and again in the course of years, we cannot but be sensible of the truth that that old drop-scene has lost its pristine freshness; that the shabbiness of its edges, especially on the prompt side, tells a tale of wholesale shakings and holding



back in connection with actors taking their 'calls' in front of it. But if anything can tend to excite the ire of the habitual playgoer, it is that latter-day abomination, the advertising curtain, which thrusts itself upon the view during the pantomime season. This most emphatically bears out the managerial contention that a theatre is a commercial speculation.

We could say much more, but exigences of space reluctantly compel us to desist. Those who wish to pursue this subject further may be directed to our article entitled 'A Plea for the Green Baize,' in the *Stage*, August 22, 1895.

### The Dramatic Illusion.

Mr. Charles Dickens' trenchant observations on the modern abuse of 'calls' were, as a matter of fact, called forth by a little plain speaking of our own in the previous month's issue of the *Theatre* magazine.

It is to be feared there are many more lost illusions in the playhouse of our time. After so much that has been written of late concerning Stageland and its inhabitants, it is doubtful whether the play, however adequately presented, exercises such a strong hold upon the mind of the spectator as it was wont to do in days gone by. One is inclined to think the dramatic illusion is in these days altogether wanting. The wholesale initiation of the public into those mysterious regions known as the world behind the scenes must of necessity minimize the enjoyment

which should be our portion in the theatre. Figuratively speaking, the spectator is nowadays as much behind the scenes as are the players. Thanks to the new journalism, he has learnt how most of the 'startling effects' are produced. Consequently, he is rarely moved by what he hears and sees; his imagination is no longer called into play. If it were possible for us to walk into a theatre and straight-way become lost in the entertainment set before us, so that we might imagine ourselves in a new world, making the acquaintance of strange people, and without a flimsy piece of paper largely made up of trade advertisements to recall us at any moment to our own matter-of-fact surroundings, our enjoyment would be complete. We should then pursue our labours on the following day under the influence of the most pleasing recollections; the play would, in fact, partake of the nature of a delightful dream. As it is, our enjoyment of the play falls immeasurably short of what it should be, for the reason that we are beset with distractions. The illuminated auditorium, the gay assemblage, the buzz of conversation, the occasional applause, the sight of the instrumentalists immediately in front of the stage—these and many other things contribute to produce the very opposite effect of that which the play ought to exercise upon the imagination.

Again, we know a great deal too much of the performers, as men and women, to persuade ourselves into the belief that they are actually the personages they are supposed to be on the stage. Theatrical

gossip is nowadays so rife that we cannot dismiss it at will; it forms part of our newspaper reading; it enters into our daily conversation; even if we take no interest in it ourselves, it is thrust upon us by our neighbours. For this reason the possibility of deriving the *highest* enjoyment from witnessing a dramatic representation under present conditions does not exist. Though we may deny ourselves a programme, and endeavour to concentrate our whole attention on the stage, we cannot close our ears to the conversation of those around us. We wish to follow the actions of the *dramatis personæ*; we do not want to be reminded that the performers are men and women moving in our own workaday world, subject to the same trials and petty worries as ourselves. Every suggestion, therefore, which places the *actor* prominently before the mind of the spectator, rather than the *character* he is playing, must necessarily tend to destroy the dramatic illusion. How can we possibly lose ourselves in the play when we hear it whispered at our elbow that Mr. A., the handsome 'juvenile lead,' has a daughter on the stage as tall as himself; that Mr. B. has just signed an engagement with the manager over the way; and so on? This is the kind of gossip freely circulated in the theatre, not only between the acts, but as the play proceeds. Where, then, does the dramatic illusion come in? Occasionally, it is true, we may have our attention riveted to the stage by a fine piece of acting; but the loud applause that follows quickly recalls us to ourselves.

But perhaps the most mischievous factor in the



destruction of the dramatic illusion in these days is the fierce light of publicity that is thrown upon Stageland by the press. Can anything be more disenchanting to our imaginations than the knowledge that the world behind the scenes is simply a vast carpenter's shop? Little wonder if we have ceased to marvel at the stage-pictures presented to our view. They no longer appear marvellous; we accept them as a matter of course. We are like actors, who cannot 'sit out' a performance without criticising it in detail. The truth is, we interest ourselves a great deal too much in a profession which exists for our entertainment alone. How different it is with a child at the pantomime, and the young person fresh from the country paying a first visit to the theatre! In the case of these, the dramatic illusion is perfect; they have ears and eyes for naught save that which is passing before them. Nor is the possibility of emulating these enjoyments so remote. All that we have to do is to place ourselves under such conditions as shall make us dead, for the time being, to the stage-knowledge we possess. King Ludwig of Bavaria, who insisted upon an operatic representation within the walls of his own theatre under all the conditions necessary to give him the highest possible enjoyment—to wit, at dead of night, alone, and surrounded by the gloom of a perfectly dark auditorium—was perhaps not such a madman as he was generally considered to have been. At all events, he knew how to keep up the dramatic illusion.

### The Personal Paragraph.

However Utopian the foregoing ideas may appear to the general reader, it is a little gratifying to note that some of them, at least, are finding expression in the American press. 'The process of disenchantment,' says the New York *Dramatic Mirror*, 'is due to the newspapers and the public's childish inclination to pull its toys to pieces to see what they are made of. The newspapers have fed the public with as much of theatrical tittle-tattle and impertinent personality as it would swallow, and certain members of the profession have assisted with an industry and ingenuity born either of the longing for notoriety, or of the belief that notoriety possesses pecuniary advantages. On this account there are very few favourite actors held in affectionate esteem by the community. Familiarity breeds contempt, as we all know, and people are not prone to maintain upon a pedestal actors whose real or fictitious characteristics and daily goings and comings they are informed of daily. The effect of this is to render the actors in question commonplace when they are before the footlights. They are no longer able to project characterizations which carry with them the quality of artistic illusion. To the people in front, they are simply themselves—the creatures of the paragraph.''

The *Chicago Times* boldly suggests a remedy. 'In order that the theatre,' it says, 'may occupy

higher ground in this country, holding the mirror up to Nature with dignity and truth, it is an urgent necessity that the people of the stage and all their belongings be withdrawn as a subject of gossip and small tattle from newspaper comment.'

'That recommendation,' says the *Mirror* in reply, 'is perhaps too sweeping. There is a vast difference between the publication of matters of real interest concerning actors and that of trivialities, scandals, impertinences, and "fakes." The dissemination of real news respecting the people of the stage and of intelligent details concerning their art is worthy of encouragement. It does not affront the dignity of the stage; it does illustrate its importance and activity as a social force, and it does lead to a better understanding of the actor's aims. It is high time, however, that a sharp line should be drawn between topics that are legitimate in this connection and topics that degrade and render ridiculous both the actor and his calling.'

### Concluding Remarks.

We have now, we trust, given the aspirant a choice of the different methods of obtaining a legitimate introduction to the stage. One or two matters only remain to be disposed of before bringing this work to a close.

Assuming him to possess the requisite ability, energy, determination, perseverance, capacity for hard work, *and* enthusiasm, there is no reason why



the novice-actor or the amateur turned professional should not retain his position on the boards and steadily improve himself. An engagement in a *répertoire* touring company will afford him plenty of experience from the outset of his professional career, but if he be attached to an ordinary travelling company he should by no means rest content with being a one-part actor. As soon as he feels perfectly at home in his single character, he should make it his aim to secure an engagement in a better company touring with a superior class of play. Indeed, the oftener he transfers his services from one touring manager to another, the better; in no other way can he hope to gain experience in a variety of parts. It is while he is in an engagement that writing-in to managers, or placing his name on the books of a reliable agent, is most serviceable; not when he is walking up and down the Strand, Micawber-like, 'waiting for something to turn up.' A sharp look-out for the announcements of new plays about to be sent on tour, or of country managers having bought the provincial rights of a recent London success, should be kept; *then* is the time to apply for a prospective engagement. It does not matter in the least if he has travelled with a company for a few months only; his sole care should be to merit a satisfactory reference from his latest manager. And there can be no doubt that a short experience in a 'walking part' at a West-End theatre must stand the beginner in good service for seeking a speaking part in a touring company.

One thing which no actor can in these days afford to neglect is a standing advertisement in the recognised theatrical journals. The very week when his professional card is absent from the columns of the *Era* and the *Stage*, a manager who has repeatedly ignored his communication may be looking for his whereabouts in vain. Self-advertisement is an important adjunct to professional ability; an actor should seize every possible opportunity of having his name in print. A brief notification of a re-engagement or of a new engagement addressed to the editors of the above journals (provided he advertises in them) is one way of securing publicity, which in this go-ahead age is so essential.

The young actor who exhibits a coloured cartoon of the part he is playing at the theatre door or in an adjacent shop-window thereby shows the manager that he is alive to his own interests. There is generally some member of the company talented for turning out this kind of rude portraiture. Mr. Phil May was originally a touring actor, and he added to his income by producing character portraits of his comrades for exhibition in tradesmen's windows.

Republication of an actor's press opinions in the theatrical organs from time to time is always a good investment.\* Many actors and actresses pay to be

\* Nearly all actors nowadays subscribe to a press-cutting agency, which is much more economical than buying up newspapers on the chance of meeting with 'notices.'

interviewed or to have their portraits published in illustrated journals; others, more enterprising still, place their photographs on sale in shop-windows, and create a fictitious demand for them by getting their friends to purchase them. These are so many ways of working the oracle which no actor who has a little money at his command should neglect.

Although a provincial experience is at all times preferable to a 'walking part' in a London theatre, the beginner should not be too hasty in exchanging the latter for the former if, by remaining on the spot, he or she foresees the remotest possibility of promotion. To 'lag superfluous' on the stage may be monotonous enough, yet it would be most unwise to forfeit the prospect of an understudy or a small speaking part when a new play is put into rehearsal. There is really no gauging the probabilities of professional advancement when once an intelligent and persevering beginner succeeds in obtaining a footing on the London boards. If 'supers' have risen to the dignity of speaking parts, extra ladies and ballet-dancers have likewise become actresses. Miss Kate Vaughan and Miss Lingard were originally trained for the ballet by Mrs. Conquest at the old Grecian Theatre, while Miss Connie Gilchrist, Miss Letty Lind, and Miss Mabel Love first came out as dancers in the Gaiety burlesques. David James, of Perkyn Middlewick fame, was attached to the *ballet corps* at the Princess's Theatre when that house was under the management of Charles Kean.



A few years' connection with one management is much more conducive to success than fitful appearances at different houses; only, as time wears on, the young actor or actress should not follow the example of those more independent members of the company who recklessly throw up a part and 'walk out of the theatre' when his or her new part does not quite come up to the length of the one immediately preceding. It is surely better to be permanently on the salary list than to walk about, although one's salary may for a time be actually reduced, which is not always the case, however.

While attending rehearsals, young actors are very prone to improve the occasion during a 'wait' by adjourning to a neighbouring saloon bar. 'I'm not on in this act; come and have a drink' is the usual invitation. This pernicious habit should be carefully kept in check, for many actors have to our own knowledge sacrificed good engagements through appearing 'muddled' at rehearsal. Another thing to be impressed upon a young actor is not to give loose rein to his tongue in a theatre. He may be well informed as to the prospective arrangements of the manager, or of a lucrative offer made to a prominent member of the company. No matter; let him listen to gossip if he will, but say nothing. And when a beginner on the stage takes the scene-shifters into his confidence by exclaiming, 'I played the part all right, didn't I?' or courts their advice in any way whatsoever, he artlessly lays himself open to be talked about in the pot-house as an 'amateur'

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who does not know his business, and is never likely to learn it.

As to the oft-discussed question whether a young girl may safely go on the stage without danger to her morals, we may say at once that she is just as safe in a theatre as she would be in a place of business—that is, if she has been properly brought up. Everything depends upon her own strength of character. The shop-girl, the work-girl, or the domestic who foolishly pays heed to the preliminary ‘Good-evening!’ of the gay young spark out for a stroll, is much more likely to stray from the path of virtue than an actress who knows that men and women merely players are in a measure exempt from the ordinary conventionalities of society. An actor, however low he may be, would never dare to make improper overtures to a lady in the company who maintains her self-respect, who, in the eyes of the world, is what is called ‘straight.’ The ‘actresses’ we hear about in judicial proceedings are mostly women of loose morals, whose talents do not warrant them being on the stage at all. Nowhere do men take advantage of an unprotected woman without first receiving some encouragement. One cannot imagine the slightest harm befalling an educated, self-respecting actress in a first-class London theatre; as these establishments are conducted nowadays, such a thing is next to impossible. In a touring company, too, the manager invariably arranges through his agent-in-advance, whose business it is to secure the lodgings, that the ladies

and gentlemen are separately housed in the different towns visited.

With 'ladies of the ballet' and the 'show-girls' in a burlesque the conditions are by no means so favourable. Actors of the lower order do unfortunately expect to have 'a good time' with these auxiliaries, because they are drawn from an inferior class of society, and rarely possess the firmness to sedulously shun their advances. Even the scene-shifters and 'property men' look forward to the pantomime season as a period of licence, during which they may play havoc among girls who do not stand on their moral dignity; but they draw the line at the *corps de ballet*. We have observed, too, particularly in minor houses, that the *figurantes* in a transformation scene do not always receive that careful handling while being strapped up to lofty irons which common decency demands; this is a matter which should be seriously looked into. Still, there is no reason why the 'ladies of the ballet' should not be as 'straight' as the superior members of the company; many of them are, we are happy to add. They have especial need of the power to say 'No!' and to slap a man's face on the slightest attempt at insult. Whether the beginner on the stage be a ballet-girl, a chorister, an 'extra,' or an actress properly so-called, she can very well take care of herself if she strenuously makes up her mind to it. It is only necessary for her to recollect that she is far removed from home influences, and that her line of conduct rests entirely with herself.



And here, before drawing to a close, let us strike a note of warning for the express benefit of the young actress who, in her own artless, unsuspecting way, sets much store upon the attentions of the irrepressible 'Johnnie.' It may seem very delightful to be treated out to supper, to be presented with fresh flowers from Covent Garden, to be driven about town in the height of the London season, and taken to matinées; but the natural history of the 'Johnnie' may be summed up in a sentence: When tired of his 'best girl,' he ruthlessly robs her of that which, above all things in the world, is most precious to her. The fate that overtook one poor actress who had a small part in our only London pantomime a few years ago, awaits all giddy maids who rely too confidently upon their ability to take care of themselves in questionable company. This girl did take good care of herself for a time, but she fell, most unwittingly, at last—the wine was drugged!

In conclusion, let the ambitious ever bear in mind that we cannot all be great actors, but every pains-taking actor may reflect credit upon the profession by doing his level best in whatever part he is called upon to play. There *must* be so many subordinate characters in every play; the chief honours of a performance necessarily fall to one or two of the *artistes* engaged. A small salary earned in a profession that he loves and is naturally fitted for will be more highly prized than a mere living wage earned in the capacity of a clerk or a tradesman's assistant. But whatever his salary may be, let him

not neglect to enrol himself a member of the Actors' Association, and also to contribute his mite to the Actors' Benevolent Fund. The former will be eminently serviceable to him in many ways, more particularly, perhaps, in legally bringing a bogus manager to book ; while the latter will insure him that timely assistance which every actor needs when fortune is at its lowest.

THE END.

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